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A DUCAL SKELETON.

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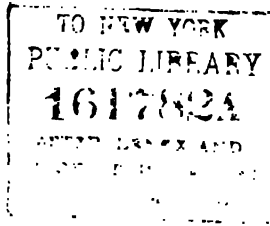
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**IN LOVING MEMORY OF MY FATHER,
DR. THOS. C. DURANT.**

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A DUCAL SKELETON.

PROLOGUE.

THE five o'clock express from London was due at the little station of Weymore; a gray November day had ended in a steady down-pour; only two figures were visible on the platform—the sturdy porter in corduroy, and a footman in mackintosh. The porter trimmed the lamp and hung it up where it blinked and darkened as the rain, wind-driven, reached it round the corner of the station, sending little rills over the platform where the roof ended and the outside darkness and wet began.

“She’s late,” remarked the porter, referring to the express.

“And she’s in a hurry,” answered the footman, referring to the Duchess of Beaulieu, for whom he was waiting.

“She’s never been up here before?” suggested the porter, understanding the allusion.

“No, his lordship was not overanxious to have her grace around these parts.”

"He's a generous, free-hearted gentleman, whatever they may say;" this because of sundry tips received.

A whistle and rumble, a flash in the gloom beyond, and the express was there. The duchess and her maid duly deposited in the carriage, the footman had to find another expected guest. Her grace was waiting impatiently, her slight figure upright, her face harder than usual. "What, to be kept here while her only son was ill—dangerously ill—waiting for whom?" The servant had apologized and hinted that no other carriage being available, they must take up the gentleman, too. Was this a time for friend or boon companion to be seeking his lordship? Let him have his revels when well; and the mother's mouth shut in a hard line. When she, the duchess, had to leave London and take a tedious journey in answer to a message from Lord Henry; when the knowledge that he was ill enough to need her, had armed each moment on the train with a hundred evil-fears to pierce her heart with their poignant dread; was she to sit and wait for any stray clubman?

The door of the carriage opened; an apology offered for detaining her and the intruder is taking his seat. But all offense is swallowed in the fear his presence creates. It is no

stranger, but Sir Julian Drayton, the court physician, who faces her.

"A consultation? and I not knowing the worst?"

"Let us hope for the best, your grace; my country *confrère* feared the responsibility of the case; his lordship's life is too precious to risk."

"Then the danger is great?" She drew back in her seat, and Sir Julian saw but faintly the delicate profile and line of silver hair, and the plain black bonnet above; one hand still nervously grasped the sill of the window, which was down. Without nothing was heard but the drip, drip of the rain and the wet thud of the horses' hoofs on the muddy country lane; the bushes near the lodge-gate brushed against the carriage as they drove into the grounds, and the grip on the sill grew more intense as the mother braced herself for the near meeting. "Oh, Absalom, my son! Absalom!" was the secret cry within her heart. Still, every inch the grand dame, she descended from the carriage steps a moment later, and extended a hand in greeting to the local practitioner, who met the duchess and Sir Julian at the door of Lord Henry's house. The three entered the library, and an anxious pause showed the duchess's control and the men's nervousness. Sir

Julian was trying to read his *confrères* face, while Dr. Moffat stood fidgeting with his watch chain, shifting the weight of his fat little body from one foot to the other. The quick tact of the duchess came to the rescue.

"You will wish to confer, gentlemen, together, and you, Sir Julian, to see my son. Perhaps it will be as well that I should await your return from his room, lest my presence during your interview excite the patient, and distract your attention."

The doctors, assuring her that this was just what they would have liked to suggest, took their departure. The housekeeper, Mrs. Black, appears with wine, and inquires what she can do for her grace.

"Is Sir Henry so much worse that his father had to be sent for?"

The housekeeper explained that Dr. Moffat was uneasy but hoped for the best. "His lordship is so strong and leads such an outdoor life, surely he will soon be well."

And though the duchess felt the terror of death knocking at the very portals of her heart, she caught at the comfort conveyed in the words.

"Yes, he was strong; her first born, her only son, the pride of her life, whose faults seemed

always half forgiven ere confessed." During the time of waiting for the doctor's return, she recalled his last visit home, how restless he seemed, how little he had to say about his life in the north where by choice he lived, how dissatisfied the duke had been with his heir wasting his days in mere pastimes, surrounded by friends and cronies when he might have entered the arena of political life and made a name among the men of the age. Her thoughts flew to the day before when the telegram summoning her to her son's sick-bed fastened upon her nerves like a bird of prey, full of ill-omened presage. His father had pooh-poohed the alarm: "What was a tumble in the field to a man like Henry? the doctor must be a frump; Henry should not be coddled; of course, the duchess was to go to amuse the invalid. She would die of ennui in that dreary neighborhood, so he would expect her back soon;" and now Sir Julian and a consultation. She felt like a prisoner awaiting judgment, when the door swung back and the doctors' black coats crossed the threshold. Dr. Moffat a step behind the great London authority, left the burden of speech to his colleague.

Sir Julian faltered in his message. As doctor, how easy to pronounce sentence; as gentle-

man, how hard to face the pathetic appeal of the anxious eyes questioning his. Calling all her pride to the rescue, the duchess took the words from Sir Julian's lips.

"He is dangerously ill, I know; but is there no hope?"

"Very little."

"Have you telegraphed for the duke?"

"We have."

"May I go to him now?"

"Yes."

And she bore her head still bravely as she left the library, but a greater trial awaited her—the shock of seeing her strong, handsome son lying helpless and swathed in bandages and tossing in pain, and she impotent to relieve his suffering or stay the approaching enemy. He recognized her and seemed to want her near him. She took his hand in hers and together they waited for the end to come. Once or twice he spoke—just a protest against his accident and fate. The doctors and nurses came and went, but the duchess still kept her vigil. All her early married life leaped back through the intervening years, and she recalled the happy days when her boy toddled, strong and lusty, beside her, and her thoughts stretched to the gray morning in Egypt, centuries ago, when

dusky mothers were wailing over their first born slain. Toward morning Lord Henry opened his weary eyes and murmured:

"Mother, send them away; I want you alone."

And when the two were left in the silence of the sick-room, he drew her hands close to his breast, and said.

"Oh, mother, forgive me for deceiving you, and when I am gone, be good to them."

"To whom?"

"To the woman I should have married, and my children. Mrs. Black will tell you where they are."

In this supreme moment of revelation and misery, the thought that a housekeeper knew the inner secrets of her darling's life, when she, his mother, had lived on in ignorance of such momentous facts, seemed to swallow up the stern significance of his speech.

"Mother, mother!" and the dying man raised himself a little in terror at her silence; "have you no pity? My children—do what is right by them," and he sank back exhausted upon the pillows.

"My darling, I will," cried the duchess, kissing him tenderly.

He pressed her hand and smiled his thanks;

he was past speech. His mother, in agony, called to the doctor; they hurried to her side. A gasp, a flutter of the eyelids, and Henry Reginald, Earl Farraday, heir of the Duke of Beaulieu, was dead.

I.

STRATHWAYS was the third and least attractive estate which the twelfth Duke of Beaulieu inherited from his father, yet he and the duchess infinitely preferred it to his castle in Scotland—a great, cold pile of gray stones, surrounded by vast domains of moor, and wood, and lochs, or to the sumptuous manor house of the midland counties. Sometimes the duke would arrange shooting parties and spend a few weeks in his northern home, and generally during the season he was to be found for a short period at his mansion in Grosvenor Square. The estate in the midland counties had been practically handed over to his eldest daughter, Ethel, who had married the clever politician, Sir Charles Layman. The best part of the year found the duke and duchess leading a quiet, humdrum life at Strathways in Dorsetshire. The mansion itself was an unassuming, dull-colored, square building, standing in the midst of a well wooded park, which boasted a small lake and fine pheasant preserves. An Italian garden,

with terraced walks, stretched in front of the house, commanding a good view of the sea, a mile away.

It was here that Bertram and Beatrice, the duke's grandchildren, spent many happy days of childhood. To the girl the world began and ended at Strathways, the boundaries of the estate being the limit of her horizon; but the boy knew a beyond. He retained clear recollections of another home, where the days seemed colder, the flowers fewer, where a jolly personality presented itself to his young eyes in the shape of a tall man who often rode the boy on his shoulder and kissed the soft little face, and where he often went to sleep in the arms of a lovely lady; he knew that he called them father and mother, but that one day a strange lady appeared and took him and Trixie away to Strathways. At first he cried bitterly, but then the peacocks on the terrace proved consolatory. Years afterward he could recall the thrill of joy which ran through his childish frame when they dawned upon his vision in all their burnished splendor. Bertram soon learned that his grandmother did not like his allusions to the past, and gradually the images of his parents receded from his memory until their faces became misty outlines of a long ago.

As the seasons came and went, the children grew tall and strong, and though they were rarely taken outside the park gates, their little world afforded them endless variety of amusements. They had their pets, their flower beds, their pony which they rode in turn or drove together, wild flowers to gather in spring, nuts in autumn, and the excitements of skating in winter, when, accompanied by their grandfather, they were allowed to venture upon the little lake that proved a rendezvous of the county families for miles around during frosty weather. Indoors they devised a hundred different games in the room given them for a nursery. It was on the top floor of the house, a large, rather dreary-looking place with little attempt at decoration beyond the heavy curtains and gayly papered walls, but to the children it seemed a paradise, where all their toys and treasures were stored. They were always glad to escape to this haven of refuge from the duty hours spent with their grandparents, when they had to walk sedately or sit up straight in the carriage, or play draughts solemnly with the duke, who always wanted to win. Every evening he devoted a few minutes to catechising the children as to their behavior during the day and gave them excellent rules for future

good conduct. Bertram and Beatrice dreaded this ordeal and were glad, after an exchange of dutiful good-night kisses, to scamper away as fast as their young legs could carry them, scudding like little mice up the wide staircase that wound from the great, square hall beneath, holding each other's hands to gain courage as they passed through the shadows of the turnings, while their grim-faced ancestors smiled down upon them from age-stained frames on the paneled wall. Though the duchess rarely bestowed a caress on the children, they realized and appreciated her affection for them and her efforts for their happiness. While they were busy with their pets or dug in their garden, she would generally take a stroll near by, stopping now and again to praise their work and calling them her two busy Bs.

They were all together one summer morning, when Aunt Beatrice suddenly walked down the graveled path and said, "Well, mother; still absorbed with the brats, I see."

Perhaps it was on account of being thus designated, or perhaps because, as Trixie told her brother, "Aunt Beatrice always looks as if she was laughing at you," that the children took a dislike to her, a feeling which she heartily reciprocated.

She was the duke's second daughter, had married a wealthy old man, and now, as a reward of virtue, was a rich widow who divided her time between London in the season and the continent the rest of the year. She rarely came to Strathways, and her advent was always unannounced.

"I felt the need of a breath of fresh air," she would explain, "and so have come to stay for a few days, if I may."

The duke, who was rather fond of his handsome daughter, rejoiced in these flying visits, but the duchess dreaded her caustic tongue. Lady Beatrice Milbanks had deeply resented the home-bringing of her brother's children, and expressed her opinion freely upon the subject.

The fact that the girl bore her name particularly rankled.

"What do you intend doing with those children when they grow up?" queried Lady Beatrice, as she walked with her mother toward the house.

"I suppose the same as other people do with theirs."

"Introduce them as the well-beloved offspring of your late son and heir?"

The duchess was accustomed to remarks of

this kind from her daughter, and made no reply.

At lunch, which was the children's dinner, they grew so confused under the criticizing scrutiny of their aunt that they dropped their knives and forks, spilt pudding on their pinafores, and in various ways disgraced themselves in the duke's eyes, who forthwith administered a severe rebuke.

"Really, papa, if you glare at those imps so ferociously, they will consider you synonymous with punishment, and by contradistinction, dub mamma 'Holiday.' "

"They realize the import of what you say; it is not wise," remarked the duchess.

The children, having finished their meal, were lingering by their grandmother's chair, whispering a petition—could they go with nurse to the farm just outside the park gates?

"Yes, if you don't chase the chickens."

"What do the neighbors say about them?" abruptly asked Lady Beatrice.

"My dear, little pitchers have long ears."

"And long legs," put in Trixie pertly, as she took her brother's hand and ran out of the room.

"Has a temper," remarked her aunt.

"Let us change the subject."

"Then tell me why you will persist in dressing like a dowdy; I assure you, mamma, that old prerogative of duchesses is out of date. A few years ago when you drove in the park, you had only to pick out the ill-dressed, shabby-looking old dame to have spotted a duchess, *mais nous avons changé tout cela* there are three dowager duchesses of Torrington now afloat in May Fair during the season, their ages varying from fifty to eighty, and each outvies the other in youthfulness, and their gay plumage is the envy and admiration of all the old cackling geese and parrots of their set."

The duke laughed. "You are right," he said; "but I prefer to see my wife as she is, all the same."

At his words a faint flush enhanced the delicate coloring of the duchess. She drew a small black cashmere shawl around her shoulders and rose from the table. Her dress certainly was of the plainest fashion—generally black, relieved with a touch of lavender or gray, with lace cap and cameo brooch, and jet bracelets; a small basket of keys, which she usually carried, completed the look of domesticity which invariably pervaded her. She was the conservative type of a bygone generation, the antithesis of her up-to-date daughter. Housekeep-

ing absorbed a good part of the duchess' time. She kept the accounts in the neatest of books, watched that there was no waste in the kitchen, and kept most of the provisions under lock and key. Even the caddy that graced the five-o'clock tea table in the drawing-room, was securely fastened between the hours when the cup that cheers but not inebriates was on duty. Lady Beatrice disliked her mother's petty economies. She felt it was chiefly owing to the influence of the duchess that there were no house parties at Strathways, and rarely any hospitalities shown to the county neighbors. As usual, she soon introduced the subject. They were on the terrace after lunch, the duke smoking an old pipe, the duchess knitting, while the peacocks noisily asserted their prior claim to the walk, as they strutted past the little group sitting in the shade, and in the sunlight beyond flaunted their spread tails.

Lady Beatrice actually groaned. "And to think that you two are content to sit here a Darby and Joan, twirling your thumbs like two country bumpkins."

"As a matter of record, we do not twirl our thumbs, and we might do worse than pose as Darby and Joan," remarked the duke, between puffs at his pipe.

"Thank heaven that I am a widow and a free agent," exclaimed his daughter, "and have the continent upon which to expend my pent-up energies, where I can indulge a thousand whims, and England—this dear, respectable, staid, old island—to keep me in touch with British proprieties."

"Beatrice, how you love to talk nonsense," mildly remonstrated the duchess.

"It is plainly seen that your love of liberty and dislike of old-fashioned conventionalities is not inherited from your mother," commented the duke.

"Every one knows you are a radical at heart, father, notwithstanding your adherence to the powers that be."

"It is necessary to consider public opinion at times," returned the duke.

"Bah! public opinion, which represents conventional morality, is merely local, taking its form and color from its environments. Don't you remember in Montaigne's essay on customs, how, quoting from classical authors, he relates the most absurd and fantastic habits and manners of different nations, showing how widely apart lie the ideas of morality in different races, and declares that the laws of conscience, which we pretend are derived from nature, really pro-

ceed from custom. Now, papa, if you were to set up a double *menage*, it is quite probable that you would be kicked out of society and committed for bigamy, while the odium of your act would stick to your innocent and unfortunate family for the rest of its days; but if an Indian potentate adds a wife or two to his harem, he pursues the evil tenor of his way with unruffled conscience, uncondemned by his social world."

The duchess stayed her knitting; she was shocked. "You would make one think you did not believe in ordinary standards of right and wrong," she exclaimed.

The duke was amused; in the sober routine of life at Strathways, his daughter's bold speech certainly broke up all monotony. Still, he did not like to agree with her advanced ideas; sometimes they seemed to run away with her. His love of laying down the law brought forth the observation that worldlings who had not the courage of their convictions too often hung upon the nod of Mrs. Grundy before deciding what was moral and what was immoral; though, he thought, "under some circumstances the worthy dame's dictum was worth considering."

"Worth considering!" echoed his daughter.

"Her power is gone. Why, if St. Paul himself were to take a jaunt on earth again and visit the varied shrines which shelve our little tutelary gods, he would find presiding over the altar to morality a Janus-faced deity smiling and frowning at the same moment on different sets of devout worshippers, confessing the same sins."

Here Lady Beatrice rose and yawned slightly. "I must write some letters and take a siesta, as there seems nothing else to do, and will join you for a cup of tea at five, and as to Mrs. Grundy, after all, who and what is this elusive personality? Has earth, air, fire, or water produced this modern parody on the ancient Sphinx? No element would father or mother her; time admits her bare existence, but maintains a scornful silence as to the whereabouts and wherefore of her birth. Our so-called fast society sets have sprung out of the terror of her reign, a revolt against overstrained conventionalism often resulting in unbridled license; the bow bent too far, snaps. When the typical British matron, wrapped in her unbecoming armor of petty insular prejudice, flushed and panting, jostles against a cool, extremely *decolleté* professional beauty, who remains calm and unblushing amid her display of physical

charms, the latter is simply a retaliation upon the former. If ever there was a palpable fraud dominating the masses, it is this same Mrs. Grundy, whose creed runs "Thou shalt not be found out."

As Lady Beatrice disappeared down the terrace, the duke wondered in what new scrape his daughter was now involved.

II.

BERTRAM, though two years older than his sister, was governed greatly by her opinion. Of the two, she possessed more self-will and obstinacy, and with this considerable beauty and a winning manner when she wished to gain a point. By nature, Bertram was more affectionate and good tempered. They lived healthy and consequently happy lives at Strathways. Except an occasional romp with the rector's children, who lived two miles away, they knew no young companions, nor missed them, until Lady Beatrice, on one of her flying visits, put it into their small heads that they were lonely and cut off from children's society from some unmentioned cause—evidently not a pleasant one. The children consulted together.

"It is because Aunt Beatrice hates us that she says horrid things always," asserted the girl.

But the boy, in the superior wisdom of his ten years, pondered: "There is some reason why she hates us, then; and there is another

reason why, as she says, we don't play with any children except at the rectory."

"What children are there—those tow-headed little girls who live at Crofton? I don't want to play with them—they look too stupid; and the big family at the Willows, Bertie, you know we decided they seemed common," with a toss of her proud little head.

"But all the same they have never wanted us to play with them; I wish we could ask somebody to tell us why. Perhaps Fraulein Schneider might know."

"She knows nothing but just her old German books," replied his sister contemptuously, for she did not rate the meek German governess very highly, principally because the good woman had no love of outdoor life and sports, while Trixie was a tomboy, and vied with her brother in running, jumping, and climbing trees.

Their nurse, though devoted, seemed somewhat out of the question. A bright idea struck Bertie: "Let's ask Mr. Jewett; he'll know."

Mr. Jewett was the rector, and the suggestion meeting with his sister's approval, the children resolved to carry it out at the first opportunity. Not long afterward an invitation came to spend the afternoon at the rectory. A troop

of boys and girls met the pony carriage as it drew up at the old-fashioned house, and Fraulein Schneider left her little charges surrounded by these playmates, who admired Bertie and Trixie immensely. It was Harold Jewett's twelfth birthday; the little host duly presented the new arrivals to the strangers, but among them one boy stared very rudely at Bertie and remarked, "What's your name?"

"I have told you, Bertram Reginald Sinclair," said Harold quickly, instinctively feeling that his friend resented the boy's manner.

"How can it be Sinclair if he is the duke's grandson? Father says the family name is Farraday."

Something in the tone of voice caused Bertie's fist involuntarily to double up; he felt a wild longing to punch the speaker's head.

"Oh, it's all the same," said Harold easily, anxious to avoid any unpleasantness. "Come, see my presents," and he hastily led the boys away toward the house.

Bertie dropped a little in the rear. The boy who had, as he felt, insulted him, was Andrew, eldest son of Colonel Tudor, who was enormously rich. He owned among other homes the Willows, a beautiful estate close to Strathways, but, as usual, the duke had not re-

sponded very cordially to his neighborly advances. Perhaps Trixie's criticism of the family was correct.

If the unpleasant little incident had not occurred, most likely Bertie, in the excitement of the birthday party, would have forgotten about his intention of interviewing the rector. But this recalled the burning question; he hesitated no longer, and while the others were looking at the gifts spread out in the schoolroom he stepped into the hall and asked a servant if he could see the rector.

"To be sure, Master Bertram; he's in the study," and Jane hurried on to complete preparations for the children's tea. At the door of the pastor's sanctum, the boy paused with failing courage, but his hand resting on the door-knob slightly rattled it and was heard, for Mr. Jewett's voice called, "Come in!"

The child nervously entered, shook hands, and on being asked if he wanted anything, came to the point at once.

"Please, sir, would you be so kind as to tell me something Trixie and I cannot understand?"

"With pleasure, my little man, with pleasure;" and the Rev. Joseph Jewett leaned back in his chair, put the finger-tips of both hands

together, and prepared to solve any theological difficulty this young visitor might propound.

"Why does Aunt Beatrice hate us so much?" said Bertie with simple directness; "and why does she say we are lonely without playmates? And oh! why did that Tudor boy say just now that my name should not be Sinclair?"

In his amazement and embarrassment the rector smoothed back his heavy gray hair, as if his brain needed soothing before it could attempt an answer to such mighty questions.

Noticing the hesitation, Bertie anxiously inquired: "Can't you tell me, sir, about Aunt Beatrice, and why the Tudor boy seemed so positive?"

"Very rude of him, indeed, to make any remarks," said the clergyman, catching at what seemed easiest to answer. "Of course, your name is Sinclair."

"But why does Aunt Beatrice hate us, and seem to make out that other children might not want to play with us?"

"What utter nonsense; you must have misunderstood," replied Mr. Jewett, wishing ardently that his wife were here to tackle the situation. He never had much to do with children, and their questions were so alarming; he must quiet this rising curiosity, or what would

his best patron, the duke, say? "You may be sure that all children worth knowing will always be only too glad to play with the duke's grandson, and that your aunt, Lady Beatrice, does not hate you, though in manner she is not always as gracious as the dear duchess."

He paused, deeming this was enough, but the boy, still persistent, said: "Then you are sure, sir, there is no reason why any one should dislike Trixie and me?"

"Tut, tut, child; get such foolish notions out of your head."

Bertram drew a sigh of relief. "We thought you would know, because grandpa said you were such a scholar."

Much pleased at this last remark, the rector took the trouble to accompany his little visitor back to the other children, and took some pains to single out both Bertie and his sister, remaining with them awhile, though the knowledge that his next Sunday's sermon still lay on his desk, hardly begun, weighed heavily on his conscience. He was a well-meaning man, wishing all the world peace and joy, but not blessed with keen insight into human nature. His sermons were scholarly, chiefly drawn from the Old Testament, but apt to be soporific on a summer morning. Mild and conserva-

tive, his sins were but those of omission. With pale blue eyes, peering through spectacles, a ruddy complexion and aquiline nose, and prominent forehead surmounted by a shock of iron-gray hair, which the children pronounced woolly, his somewhat odd appearance gave rise to his possessing several sobriquets. At Strathways he was generally mentioned as the paradox, "Being in one both sheep and shepherd," remarked Lady Beatrice, and the resemblance grew with the years. It would have distressed him immeasurably to have any child treated rudely while enjoying his hospitality, and that one of the duke's grandchildren should be annoyed was preposterous. He did not feel satisfied until Bertie's face lost its perplexed and troubled look.

"After all, it is only staving off an evil day," commented the rector to his wife, later, when the last of the little guests had departed.

III.

TRIXIE was highly indignant when her brother related the rudeness of Andrew Tudor. "He is a horrid, common boy," she exclaimed, "and I do wish you had punched his head."

Bertie secretly rejoiced at his sister's voicing his innermost wish. Notwithstanding occasional tiffs, the two were devoted to each other, and though the younger, Trixie generally settled any vexed question between them. So it was she who started the idea of a hive, where the two busy Bs could hum by themselves to their heart's content. For many days the nurse was rampant with indignation at having to change their clothes whenever they returned from a ramble by themselves. They would come in wet and muddy and covered with bits of straw, twigs and moss, and looking anything but a duke's grandchildren, as she angrily remarked. At last, all reprimanding and coaxing having failed to alter their ways, the nurse reluctantly complained to the duchess, who quietly investigated the matter herself and dis-

covered the cause of the sudden untidiness. In the entrance to the wood, snugly hidden behind old trees, rose a most extraordinary structure, rudely shaped to resemble a hive. The lower part was made of dried mud and stones and the upper part of branches and bits of wood, the interstices being stuffed with straw and moss. A small doorway had been made, through which the children crept and curled up in the stuffy interior of their beloved and laboriously constructed house. When the two culprit bees were unearthed, their first thought was for their handicraft.

"Punish us, grandmamma," they cried simultaneously; "but, oh! don't pull it down."

Their appeal touched the duchess, who promised not to have the hive demolished, but put a veto upon any further play in it.

The duke was annoyed and amused at this escapade. "What clever little beavers they are," he exclaimed on examining the work. "We shall find the lake dammed next, unless we find other work to occupy those busy hands; and the duchess resolved to produce a substitute for the hive.

After a subdued week, during which an intense air of penitence pervaded Bertie and Trixie, the duchess took them for a walk one

morning and revealed among the sturdy branches of a giant oak, a little house built of small trees, like a miniature log cabin. It had a pointed roof, was completely covered with bark outside, and large enough to hold the children standing. They were speechless with delight.

"And now, my dears," said their grandmother, "with the carpenter's help, you are to make your own chairs and table, and what else you want for furnishing your tree house."

Henceforth the busy Bs had plenty of manual labor to consume their spare hours, and "The Roost," as they christened their new acquisition, proved an unfailing source of delight. Here it was they were introduced to Sir Walter Scott and Dickens, and a host of other friends worth knowing. Here they discussed their troubles and pleasures and planned their futures. Bertram wanted to be a sailor and cruise in quest of all the famous lost treasures. Beatrice would own a farm and milk cows. What cared they for their aunt's sarcasm or rude Tudor boys, when they were actually householders and veritable denizens of the woods, companions to bright-eyed squirrels and sweet feathered songsters. They had built a platform extending outside their house and attached to this was a light ladder, which they

could draw up into the branches and thus cut off all communication with the lower world together with all the inhabitants thereof, excepting cats and gymnasts. They had begged the duchess not to reveal this new haunt, and only a favored few were allowed to visit it, Lady Ethel Layman among the number. She generally spent a couple of weeks at Strathways each summer and from the first had won the children's hearts. She resembled her mother in face and manner, having the same low voice and dignified gentleness. When together the hard lines around the mouth of the duchess softened perceptibly. She smiled often and looked ten years younger during her daughter's visits.

The tree-house had been in existence a year, and the busy Bs were preparing a small tea party, which included their dolls, a favorite kitten, two small dogs, Tiny and Tim, and last but not least, their loved Aunt Ethel. It was a balmy June afternoon, clouds tempering the sun's rays, and with a premonition in the air of rain for the evening. The duchess and Lady Ethel sat in the morning room, overlooking the Italian garden; below, on the terrace the peacocks were sunning themselves, uttering now and again a shrill screech of gladness. The duchess felt happy and at peace with the

world; her daughter's presence seemed to fill the room with light and music.

"The person is waiting at the lodge for an answer, your grace." A servant had entered and is tendering a letter on a silver salver.

Indifferently the duchess reaches for the note and breaks the seal. Glancing at the contents, she dismisses the servant; she will ring when the answer is ready.

Lady Ethel looks at her mother anxiously; the delicate face has grown pale. A moment's silence and the letter changes hands. The duchess sits very still, looking out upon the garden below and the stretch of park beyond, and the blue sea in the distance, but her eyes are non-seeing. She is thinking of the dreary November night seven years ago, when she drove through the drip of the rain from the little country station to her son's deathbed, of the bitter end and the morrow when the duke arrived, stricken with grief and raging against the inscrutable ways of Providence, which snatched away in his prime the heir to a dukedom. She recalled the scene that followed and every word; at first the husband's hot denial to her entreaty that the orphaned children of his son should return with them to Strathways, the outburst of wrath that there should be a blot

upon the family escutcheon, the sullen silence, unrelenting and unforgiving; then, a little later, beside the pale corpse, the break-down of a strong nature and the passionate cry from a father's heart. Yes, his boy's wishes should be carried out to the letter. Lastly the walk in the cold gray morning, with Mrs. Black, to the dainty home nearby, where Lord Farraday had nested his unwedded mate, the pause on the threshold, while the housekeeper entered to announce her grace's visit; the start of recognition, when a pretty boy of four entered the drawing room, leading a round-eyed girl of two, who stared and stared with her bright dark eyes at the duchess, who saw again her own boy gazing at her from out of the dim distant past; and then the pale, weeping woman, whose grace and beauty even great grief could not hide; the short parley, the reluctant assent to comply with the wishes of the dead; the heart-rending cry of farewell, and then home with the duke and two unhappy little children, clinging to each other.

Forgotten? No! In her letter the writer need not have asked the duchess that. Such phases of life can never be forgotten till the earth rattles on the coffin lid.

"You will see her?" ventured Lady Layman.

"How can I well refuse?"

The children waited impatiently for their most important visitor. Instead a maid arrived with a summons to the house.

"Oh! grandmamma, what is it? and the kitten has stolen our cream, and Tiny skipped down the ladder, but she's not hurt; only frightened," rattled off Trixie, when she perceived a stranger in the room, a good-looking elderly person with gray hair, who was gazing at the children intently.

"This is Mrs. Black, my dears," said the duchess, "and before she leaves England she wanted to see you both."

"Because, your grace, I promised her I would see them."

"But we do not know you," remarked Bertie in his terrible truthfulness, wondering why the lady wanted them inspected, "just as if we were to be photographed, or something," he told Trixie afterward.

Mrs. Black's eyes filled with tears. "I knew you once, dearie," she began, when a look from the duchess checked her speech. She took each of the children's hands in hers and pleadingly said: "May I?" Receiving assent, she stooped and kissed Bertie and Trixie.

"And she might as well have been called

White, for she looks so white and her hair just matches her face," confided the boy to his sister and the pets when they were once more in their beloved "Roost." "And oh, Aunt Ethel, hold on to the ladder, for it might slip."

IV.

"Pilate saith unto Him, What is truth?"—*John* x. 38.

THE little church of St. Stephen's was crowded, the news that a young Oxford divine was to preach the morning sermon having brought out the parishioners in full force, and as the text was given out, all eyes turned toward the pulpit. In the Duke of Beaulieu's square old-fashioned pew sat Bertram and Trixie, their eyes fixed on the preacher, a slight young man with beautiful eyes and an orator's mouth. His sensitive face flushed as he looked down on the congregation:

"Diogenes and his lantern! What a sight for all the little snobs if he suddenly dawned on their May Fair horizon."

The opening sentence startled the devout portion of his listeners. The sermon certainly promised to be different from Mr. Jewett's learned disquisitions on Moab's rebellion or Manasseh's wickedness. The few backsliders

who invariably dozed during the rector's homilies, moved uneasily in their pews. Could it be possible that they were to be defrauded of their customary forty winks?

"What would the ancient sage have to say to the crutch and toothpick tribe of fops? Nothing. Blowing out his light, he would swing himself down the nearest street and again take refuge in his tub."

Lady Beatrice adjusted her *pince nez* and wondered whether for once the service would not bore her. She rarely occupied the family pew, her excuse being that the memorial window representing St. Stephen's martyrdom was too atrocious. "Fancy facing for two hours those raw reds and washy blues, with stones that look like badly baked pancakes. The saint's disgusted expression shows his opinion on the subject." But to-day even the crying colors of the window were overlooked. The young priest continued:

"And we, who are not Diogenes—have we found one honest man? As a nation, are we made up of honorable, truthful souls? Do they swarm in business, or in the arena of politics? Take up a newspaper—hardly a day passes without a flaring account of a defaulting cashier or swindling banker; the spirit of our mer-

cantile age cries to get all you can—honestly, or dishonestly; how few of the great fortunes accumulated in the last twenty years that have not flecked or stained their maker's good name! Yet we welcome these men with open arms as long as they head our subscription lists and fill our churches. Let them but present a bland, stereotyped conventionality, seasoned by outward piety, and the golden means becomes for them the golden mean, for we do not condemn fraud and deceit! That keen sense of honor, once inherited from father to son

“ Through nine long centuries
To hate and hound a lie,”

has dwindled down, alack! to a mere protest against falsehood in general. When men had to fight, and often die, for every truth they held, its value seemed gigantic, but all is so intensely proven to-day that we lose our grasp on truth itself; her effigy we flaunt from the housetops, but deep must the well be and hewn out of prehistoric rock, that hides her in its silent depths. What is truth? Absolute sincerity of thought, word, and deed; the sense of other's rights being as sacred to us as our own; to concentrate our souls upon being instead of seeming—but the tarnished thread of falsehood

runs through all our golden woof of life. Children foreshadow it in their play; young men and women enact it in their flirtations; age realizes it in the sharpness of business men, the contriving of managing matrons. It is the curse of our civilization that we live artificial lives, talk artificial talk, think artificial thoughts, wear artificially colored carnations in our buttonholes! Even our voices are trained to an artificial pitch—either an affected lisp or drawl, or a loud, discordant bawl assures the listener that the natural tones of the speaker are absolutely ignored. How much truth is conveyed in the handshake of to-day? Does a wiggle-waggle in the air inspire one with a sense of true friendship? A man's grip is the unwritten signature of attested regard."

The preacher paused and Trixie pinched her brother to catch his attention, when she whispered:

"Oh, Bertie! The Tudors wiggle-waggle!"

This was said with a purpose, for since the days of Harold Jewett's birthday party, Colonel Tudor had induced the duke to exchange some slight hospitalities, in consequence of which Bertram had lost his heart to Andrew's pretty sister Hilda, much to Trixie's openly expressed disgust. The Tudor's pew was near the duke's,

and the young people often exchanged glances during service. The duchess had noticed the whisper; it annoyed her, and she gave Trixie a severe look, but before a rebuke could be administered, her attention was arrested by the preacher's next words:

"We never know the end of a lie; you cast it forth like a pebble into a smooth lake, hear the splash and for a moment see the spray whitening the blue bosom of the water, but what eye can follow the widening circles that spread further and further away in the distance? You salve your conscience with the thought that it is better for the sake of loved ones to be deceitful upon some vital point, but what is your wisdom against the might of naked truth? Be sure, if it exists, concealment is only defying the purposes of a wise Deity, who, for unfathomable reasons to our finite souls, permits sin and sorrow to enter each earthly paradise. All we poor Adams and Eves will ever find the fruit of the tree of life bitter to our taste, and we would fall prone in the dust, whence we have sprung, were it not that the loved tones of a Saviour tell us not to despair, for He is the Truth as well as the Way and the Life. Ah! verily, even at our best, we but see through a glass dimly now—but then, face to face with

our neighbor and our God, with all our little quibbles laid bare in the light of Heaven, we shall know even as we and our petty deceits and white lies are known."

To one listener swift remembrance of a white lie came with the stern recognition of the truth of the preacher's words. "And yet," thought the duchess, "I did it for the best, adhering to my promise to the letter; but when we meet face to face, will he blame me for this lie? Yes, we see but through a glass darkly now, and the light at times seems beyond our sight."

The rest of the young clergyman's discourse was lost upon the duchess, who pondered over the vexed question raised by passing words in a sermon. The preacher waxed more and more eloquent and riveted Bertram's attention, whose candid soul responded to the fervent appeal from the pulpit. Lady Beatrice thought she admired the stranger's mouth and a faint curiosity stirred her to a desire to meet him. The duke approved of the sermon, which lasted barely half an hour, and devoutly hoped Mr. Jewett would profit by such a good example, and shorten his Old Testament homilies.

"Who is he?" asked the duchess, after service. She was standing near the porch, waiting for the duke, who had gone to find the rector.

"His name is Herbert—the Rev. Paul Herbert," answered Colonel Tudor, who made a point of hovering near his ducal neighbors on all available occasions.

The next moment her grace was wondering whether she was pleased or annoyed to see her husband returning with the young clergyman. The introduction was followed by an invitation to Strathways, and Bertram had the extreme pleasure of sitting next to Mr. Herbert at luncheon.

"As clergymen go," remarked their Aunt Beatrice, "he is quite a decent sort."

Even Trixie condescended to pronounce her august approval on him. She was at that awkward age when a girl's mind is as angular as her legs and arms, and men and boys found little favor in her eyes, though she still stood in wholesome awe of her grandfather and evinced a strong affection for her brother. The masculine portion of their neighbors she criticised with the intolerant spirit of the very young. Mr. Jewett himself had no influence over the child, who, when talking of him to her brother, dubbed him a "milk-sop." The boy, though not partial to the rector, felt that the little shaft of contempt shot far off the mark. Having outgrown Fraulein Schneider's capac-

ity, the duke had handed his grandson over to Mr. Jewett. For over two years Bertram had daily tasted of his new teacher's erudition, mastering the rudiments of the classics, and safely crossing the *pons asinorum*, and knew himself to be an ignorant lad skirting on the very outside edge of knowledge where the sheep-faced clergyman had already both feet firmly planted. Lingering after lessons, he culled much that was curious and interesting from the rector's library, or from the worthy man himself, and gradually learned to digest somewhat ponderous fare and to assimilate it with ordinary literary food, and consequently flavor his conversation therewith. Now, for the first time, meeting a young man fresh from Oxford, Bertram gleaned a sheaf of new opinions. He hung upon the Rev. Paul Herbert's words and flushed with pleasure when the divine cordially clasped hands at parting, with the hope that they would meet again. Harold Jewett, in return for a burst of confidence, informed Bertram that unless the house burned down, or accidents crippled him for life, he was going to Oxford with the guineas his father was saving toward that end.

"Then why can not I go?" cries Bertram.

His friend thinks there is no reason to pre-

vent, and suggests that the duke be sounded on the subject. With eager steps, the lad invades his grandfather's sanctum. He leaves with dampened enthusiasm. It was neither no nor yes with the duke; only a waving of the theme into an indefinite background. Perhaps Bertram was not deemed clever enough to do honor to his name. The lad squared his shoulders. "I will work; grandfather shall see what stuff has been inherited."

Mr. Jewett noticed the spurt and wondered. The Farradays, as a race, were leal men and true to king and church, but none had ever been scholars; was the bar sinister to infuse higher learning into the blood? Odd if the irregularities of the sire were to produce the regular heartbeats of a pedant in the son. But the love of sport was a strain crossing the best bred Farraday, and this lad promised to inherit the grit of his forefathers; he was strong for his age, and a lover of outdoor life. No, a scholar, maybe, but never a bookworm to the exclusion of manly sports.

To add to his guineas, the rector had still another pupil, an overgrown dunce, nephew to Colonel Tudor, whose fists had felt the brows of many a village lad, and who was given to rat-hunting and dog fighting. The duke had

not smiled on this companion for Bertram, but reflected that he could not always keep his grandson wrapped in the cotton-wool of home influences; his eyes and ears and nostrils must test the sights and sounds and scents of the outer world one day. Better let a little of the sulphur fumes tickle his organs now while yet within reach of the reaction of Strathways. Harold Jewett's influence, however, more than balanced any that Dicky Tudor might have exercised over his fellow student. Though not even confessing it to himself, Bertram shelved the rector's son in his heart with Trixie. Young Jewett was a healthy, hearty specimen of an honest Anglo-Saxon lad, with a keen, sympathetic nature, and admired his friends so openly they perforce responded to his warmth. For months after the new pupil's advent, no cloud obscured the rectory sky. Then, without premonition, came a bolt from the blue. Over what at first was a mere wordy squabble, both Bertram and young Tudor lost their tempers. The phrase "Dickey birds' chirps are more bucolic than classical," roused a latent hate in the bosom of the colonel's nephew for one more favored than he.

Quid pro quo—"Dickey birds were at least better received than——"

Bertie flashed out one word, "Liar!"

"Ask the county; not a butcher's brat but knows the history of your adoption."

Harold Jewett instinctively laid a hand on his friend's shoulder; they exchanged glances. Something in the elder lad's face made his comrade shiver, with a vague apprehension of undefined sorrow. He grew pale; his arms fell to his side.

"If this is true, I fight you to-morrow for the taunt; if false, for the lie," and without daring to read further in his friend's eyes, Bertram strode down the high-hedged lane, now white with blossoming May. The dust beneath his tread was as heated ploughshare to the martyr of old, so painfully lagged each leaden foot, so weighted was his whole being with the deadening thought, blotting out blue skies and blithe spring sunshine. Like a suppressed cyclone he burst upon the solitude of the duke at his writing table, already planning a shooting party for September at his Scotch castle.

"Grandfather, what of my parents? Tell me the truth."

"I told you long ago. When scarcely more than an infant, you lost them both." This was said rapidly to stave off the questions read in the boy's hungry eyes.

"I know so much—but the rest—" the young voice faltered.

"What rest?" Yet the duke knew.

"Oh, grandfather! they say the worst—that my mother——"

"Was a devoted woman. She lost all in losing your father."

"But was she—did he——"

The words would not come. The duke turned his shaggy brows toward the lad. "My dear," and his tones grew almost gentle as a woman's, "whatever wrong was done was deeply rued—and repaired to the best of our powers."

"Then it is true—all true!" The world seemed to stand still with horror at the unveiling of this steely fact.

"Bertram, recollect, this is your home, and our love is yours; be brave, my dear boy; being our acknowledged grandson will prove your open sesame. Be a true Englishman, and he who will not welcome you will not welcome me."

Later the memory of the duke's words was balm to a stricken heart, but then with the gorgon headed truth staring at him, the lad's soul froze within him. What matters all he heard after his grandfather's first admission;

kind sentences glided off his stony self like raindrops off the gilded vane above the church steeple.

At last free to seek relief in self-communing, Bertram is on the terraced walk bent for the wood's deepest recess. His sister's laughing jarred him back to a sense of duty. Trixie! The blow falls on her too—but not now; no, this trial must not be shared yet.

"Bertie—whither away?" and linking her arm in his, they wander on into the green shade, she rattling on with gay nothings, thinking her brother downcast, he making supreme efforts to mislead her astuteness. They reach the "Roost" and ascend in silence.

"What troubles you, dear?"

"Good news proves too much to carry at times——"

"Good news for you—oh! tell me, Bertie."

"Grandfather has just told me I am to go to Oxford," and to express his satisfaction at the attaining of supreme wishes, to Trixie's sore amazement, Bertram laid his head on her shoulder, and for the first time since early infant days, wept bitterly.

V.

"You will not go?"

"Of course I shall."

"You will regret it, Sinclair."

"Not I."

Harold Jewett sat on the wide window seat overlooking the High. The rooms had low ceilings and uneven floors, with one step down into the bedroom. The mantel shelf boasted some carving, and the place wore a typical Oxford air, intermingled with a flavor of Strathways. Here and there home photographs and a few pet pictures brightened the somber walls. A tobacco jar on the table between the two friends furnished Bertram the occupation of rolling cigarettes. A card bearing the inscription "Lottie Blank, 35 Carew Road. Tea at 5 o'clock," lay near the tobacco jar.

"Bates is going, and a lot of jolly fellows."

"You know my opinion of Lord Bates and his crew. Don't get yourself associated with that set at the very beginning of things."

"Hang it all, Jewett! can't one meet certain men sometimes, without being in their set?"

"One thing will lead to another."

"In the meanwhile I go to inspect female charms at 5 P. M., and drink an innocent cup of tea."

"I beg you earnestly not to go, Bertie."

But the influence of the one friend weakened under the strong combination of college life and a host of new acquaintances.

"Did you never meet any amiable Lotties at festive tea tables, Harold?" responded Sinclair.

"I have been differently situated than you are; the knowledge that every penny saved toward landing me here meant a grind for the *mater* and *pater*, changed most temptations' rosiest hues to leaden colors. Besides, I shall have to work for my living, and unless Oxford means great gain to me, morally as well as intellectually, I had better twirl thumbs at home."

"Seeing life is not ever identifying one's self with sots or rakes."

"Seeing life might include a study of architecture as well as teacups. Come and inspect St. Mary's with me."

"Not this morning."

"This afternoon, then—on the Char, in a punt."

"I am with you there."

Harold knit his brows as he regained the street. His year at college had brought its lesson, and he would save Bertram from drifting into ways and company that meant the sapping of life and purse. Lord Bates had already earned the reputation of sowing more wild oats than any man of his set, but to press Bertram too far would savor of the 'prig. It would be better to let him go his gait alone. Still, there was Trixie to consider—proud, wilful, beautiful Trixie, who, budding into regal womanhood, caught and held Harold's loyal heart. He knew his fate before entering college. The boy's admiration had developed into the young man's devotion, but, like the most timid bumpkin, he dared not sound his lady's regard by so much as a sigh in her ears. Trixie had made him promise to help Bertie to prick his way through the besetting college days. Her eyes, now melting, now defiant, had thrown him reminders from the photographs' around Bertram's rooms. But how avert what the Bates crew sought to precipitate? Suddenly a luminous idea flashed solution, and a walk to Iffley brought content through a note sent by the afternoon post to the Rev. Paul Herbert.

Fearing to jar his friend, there was no allu-

sion to the tea, though Bertie frankly acknowledged he had not found it interesting. Nor did Harold venture more than a passing suggestion of disapproval, 'thrown out tentatively when Sinclair proposed to give a "breakfast" to Lord Bates and half a dozen kindred spirits. But no inducement could add Harold to the invited guests. Having condemned the promised feast, he would not share it. But below the blue flower floating in the college cup, Harold beheld more than the sparkling nectar. He knew that the longing to be acknowledged an equal urged his friend to outvie those whose purse and credit were more elastic than his own. Though the keen anguish of learning the truth about his own parentage had softened with time, Bertram was still sensitive to all touching on social status. The ice once broken, the subject had been thrashed threadbare between the friends, as it was impossible to discuss it with Trixie. Jewett caught at the duke's words. Of course, no lad need dread the future with an acknowledged ducal grandsire as a background.

For several seasons Bertram had been included in the duke's parties to Scotland. There, within the castle's gray walls, or out with gun upon the purple moors, he had learned

to hold his head high amid his grandfather's guests, and to deport himself as to the manor born. This served as preparation to Oxford.

Since young Tudor flung the ill-savored taunt in Sinclair's face and gleaned a whipping thereby, no one had twitted or seemed to twit Bertram with the stain upon his birth. The knowledge of it often slept, but never died in his heart. A burning sense of the wrong inflicted by his father sometimes flashed forth in sarcastic speech. His mother's image but conjured up tenderest emotions; had she not sacrificed herself? So Harold knew much of what was passing in his friend's mind. He waited until sunset and sauntered up the High to find Sinclair at his window, flushed from the parting glasses, the rooms scented with tobacco, the fumes of the cup still clouding his brain.

It was no moment to moralize. Let it pass. But on the morrow, Bertram, with headache and empty purse, bemoaned his fate.

"I had to do it in style, confound it! The breakfast has about swallowed up my ready cash."

"If I were not poor, you would be welcome to share with me——"

"No, no; I make my bed and lie on it. The breakfast was a success. I dance and pay the

pipe, which means economy for the rest of this month and fresh resolutions for the next."

Harold chased away a cheery little thought that buzzed about his brain like a blithe bee; he did not wish Bertram to know that a certain letter had been written and answered, and feared some news would shine in his eyes and be read. His silence was misinterpreted.

"You deem me wasteful of a good duke's gift?"

"Come, come; we'll not discuss, with a rare sky overhead and a breeze abroad worth breathing; let us take a long walk."

"I need some air to sweep away the cobwebs these metaphysicians weave round my senses."

Twenty-four hours later Bertram burst into Jewett's room in Worcester, and, taking the book his friend held, tossed it aside, crying:

"A truce to your dry dominies, when we dine with a living one to-night. He has written to you to expect him, and yet my oracle gave no sign!"

Harold laughed, and tipping his chair back, stretched his arms, with a glance at the gardens below. When an innocent secret lies hidden behind honest lids, it is best to lower them before the inquisitive gaze.

"The unexpected, when agreeable, should

never be anticipated by commonplace disclosures. Paul Herbert is delightful—his advent here doubly so, when unannounced.”

“Think of it, Jewett; we three powwowing over beer and cider in pewter and plate, when welcome awaits him at every college, with sherry and port in silver and gold, the heads only too glad to sport their best behavior in honor of such a guest!”

“But you are a duke’s grandson!” and Harold’s blue eyes twinkled.

Bertram’s smile answered the twinkle: “If a coal-heaver’s grandson, he would do the same if he liked you.”

“Therefore by all logical deduction, you are liked by our friend. Bertram, you are a lucky dog;” and Sinclair’s star was in the ascendant that day, for at dinner a surprise awaited the young men. Paul Herbert had another guest—a dean, worth meeting, with invitations on tongue-tip to a charming Oxford home, where wife and pretty daughters dispense graceful hospitalities. The worldly advantages accruing from the clergyman’s visit were augmented next morning when he introduced Bertram to some clever young fellows who were working in dead earnest. When the train bore Paul Herbert out of sight, he left a dozen channels open for his young friends’ energies.

VI.

“WORCESTER COLLEGE, OXFORD,

“DEAR TRIxie: Do not imagine my silence due to the lethean influence of Oxford air. However dear college life is to me, my ambitions and hopes are but tame~doves that wing themselves home gladly, while Bertie’s aims and endeavors are eagles and fain would pierce the blue. My thoughts are ever with the dear ones at the rectory and at Strathways, but my liege lady’s parting words were ‘write to me of Bertie,’ and it would hardly have edified her to chronicle such details as these: Item B. ate a good breakfast and unpacked boxes, ate a fine lunch and took a stroll, disposed of excellent dinner, and smoked and loafed with me till 11 P.M. Item, ate another large breakfast, hung up photographs and pictures, etc., etc. The first settling down to new hours, new rooms, new associations, are merely interesting as the text of the discourse to follow.

“Besides, Bertie has been penning you sheets

of descriptions of his surroundings and first impressions of our Alma Mater. As you seem to constitute me a sort of bodyguard to Bertie, I felt my position onerous when he ran across the Bates' crew. I mentioned Lord Bates to you once, and know you do not favor his theories. Of course, these goblins pounced upon Bertie. I shook my head in vain, and might have wobbled it off my shoulders for all your beloved brother cared—not that a few weeks from you and home would depreciate the worth of affection in his eyes, but new influences were treading on each other's heels so fast that mine seemed out of date and of less importance. Just as a little black imp of chagrin began to whisper discouragement in my ear—presto! change. The imp was displaced by a look from those wonderful gray eyes we once sat beneath at St. Stephen's.

“Enter Paul Herbert, exit the imp forever. Bertie must have told you of the pleasure we experienced meeting this pearl among men. His white soul peeps forth through those marvelous eyes, and the delicate lips but open to drop rubies of speech, which glow and glow, and are worth a king's ransom. I have had the pleasure of seeing him several times on his visits to Oxford before Bertie came here, and I

told you of my day at Honesdale, where he reigns supreme in his parish and home. His people are from the north; they followed him to his work. Such a dear old mother, and sweet, gentle sister, his elder by several years. It takes less than an hour by rail to Honesdale, and Bertie is to be his guest next week and will tell you of his visit. I know it will give you pleasure to hear that the Bates' crew have lost their grip already. Paul Herbert introduced us to Dean Stanfield, and his charming home circle captivates Bertie's stray hours. Hilda Tudor is surely displaced by the pretty daughters—be calm, there is safety in the society of three equally fascinating girls, and they but initiate your hero into the higher mysteries of harmless flirting. Through our good dominie we also met some Baliol men, who are cormorants for work. Of course, your brother responded when appreciated by new clever minds. Now he frequents the debates at the university and will be on his legs for a maiden speech before we have time to turn about. May you be there then to hear him. May you likewise honor us by your gracious presence during the Eights' week. How often I urged upon you the charm of Oxford gayeties, but a friend's plea carries less weight with you than a brother's. Now that Bertie

will add his voice to mine, perhaps kind fates will waft you here before the long vacation. My affectionate duty to the duke and dear duchess, and pats for your canine companions. Write to me, dear friend.

"Yours ever,

"HAROLD JEWETT."

"149 HIGH STREET.

"TRIXIE, DEARIE: Your letter eyes me reproachfully from my desk. Reply should have reached you sooner, but so much has come into my daily work and play. First, to answer your questions. No. 1. 'Did the lunch go off well?' Swimmingly, as regards consumption of well-cooked viands and deliciously brewed cups; haltingly, as regards the depleted condition of my exchequer the next morning. Lord Bates and his friends profited by a sumptuous meal, which I am rueing in sackcloth and ashes. This for your ear alone. No 2. 'What new friends have I made?' Three Baliol men, who are worth a college full of the ordinary fellows here. We sit in my rooms or theirs, or, better still, in dear old Harold's, overlooking that lovely garden at Worcester, and talk and talk, till the affairs of nations are threshed threadbare. Romanism is a red rag to Jew-

ett; for the rest, he is the least excitable of us all and holds his own with the cleverest. Did he tell you of his speech the other night at the Union Society debate? I was so proud of him. If I can ever do half as well, instead of modestly hiding my light under a bushel, I shall flaunt my talent forth in the eye of day, like our peacocks their tails on the terrace. Next, a delightful dean with ideal wife and three daughters, but they have neither your carriage nor figure, Trixie, and all this I owe to the most unselfish of men—Paul Herbert. Don't you remember how glad we both were to hear of him when Harold first came to Oxford? Though this brick of a clergyman stayed only twenty-four hours here, he found time to launch me upon the dean's domestic current and constitute me a comrade to the Baliol fellows. I am to visit Honesdale and the Herbert family next week. How I wish you could be with me then; you *must* come for the Eights'. I will write to grandmother and you must plead prettily to grandfather. How much we can enjoy together. Paul Herbert is worth a journey alone to meet. He lifts one right out of commonplaces into strong, clean thoughts, and yet withal is so full of kindly interest for all one's little pleasures and foibles. The dean's circle

will please you, too, and we will give you a tea, and invite our picked men to do you homage. Dear sister, think of it! Christ church to admire, with Hall and Kitchen inimitable, and the Broad Walk beyond! the solemn beauty of the cathedral; St. Mary almost opposite my rooms, and the exquisite window at New College, and the service at Magdelene with singing to ravish the senses, and the peacefulness of a stroll through Addison's walk afterward; or a row on the Thames to Iffley, or punting on the Cherwell; or we can drone over the precious manuscripts in the Bodleian, or the Turner drawings at the Taylorian; or we can wander through the college gardens, each so full of charm. Of course, Harold swears by his, and truly the Worcester garden is most beautiful.

"I am almost forgetting your next question 'How about music?' I am going to join one of the societies here and peg away at my songs in spare moments, and anticipate the college concerts. As to my work, it fluctuates; but fear not, sister mine, I shall be ready for my 'little go.'

"Your last question need not have been penned—'Do I miss you?' Surely your soul cries, 'Yes.' I am fascinated by this new life after the long, hermit years at Strathways, but

beneath the surface flutter of collegiate pulse-beats, a heart throbs for those at home. I write to grandmother next week. My love to all, including the dogs. How are the ponies?

“Your affectionate brother,

“BERTRAM SINCLAIR.”

“STRATHWAYS.

“DEAREST BERTRAM: Paul Herbert is a trump! and so is Harold. My love to the latter and tell him to write again, and I will answer some day. Lord Bates is my *bete noir*. I dreaded at first he would become your ‘old man of the sea.’ Drop him by degrees, lest he strangle much good in you.

“Of course, I will use my small powers to urge my elders to our way of thinking. May the gods second my efforts and post me to Oxford in due season. In the meantime, don’t imagine me drowned in melancholy, and green with envy. Great things are happening. It seems like a dream, but pinching proves me awake. My trunk is packed, and I am going away. Where? you cry, surprised. Patience! sweet sir. After your departure they all tried to console me. Grandfather gave me a sounding kiss and the information that I was to have a new habit. Grandmamma confided that my

room was to be refitted at last, and Aunt Ethel put her arms around me and carried me off for a walk. I was cross as a bear and poured forth my woes. How it jarred to see grandmamma wearing such shabby clothes and locking up the tea caddy three times a day. How I wished I was a man or could have lots of money and travel; you know what I am when started on that tack. Aunt Ethel listened but said little. Aunt Beatrice's advent last week enlivened things slightly and I forgot having crawled out of my shell the day you left. Judge my astonishment when yesterday I was told to pack my clothes, as Aunt Ethel was going to carry me off to-morrow, and the fairy tale does not end here. This visit includes the county ball! Bertie, dear, can you realize that your Cinderella has actually found her fairy godmother, and the pumpkin is a glittering coach? Only the rince is lacking. I do not bewail his absence—quite the contrary, shall dance all the heartier and save my glass slippers at that. I will write from Thornycroft. If only you could be at the ball! Aunt B. glares at me as though my small social *début* meant her a personal injury. Tell me all you do, and hear, and read, and see, and think.

“The dogs are well, except Rover, who hurt

his foot running—nothing serious. Ponies frisky and the elders so-so. Grandmamma does not seem quite so well these days. Aunt B. gets on her nerves. Oh, Bertie! I can hardly sit still with the word ‘ball’ buzzing in my brain. My feet beat time to the unplayed music. Fairy godmother is calling. *Au revoir*, dearest and best of brothers. I will only dance with the old county families. No parvenus for me.

“Your loving sister,
“B.”

“STRATHWAYS.

“Your note, dear Sir Disdainful, followed close upon the heels of my arrival. Of course, we must arrange early for an Ascot party, and Lady Bell and her shadow, the young poet, shall be on the list, as suggested, but beware her wiles! Ah, you laugh; yes, I hear you—but lay not this flattering unction to your soul. I could not be jealous if I tried, but the golden-wigged little lady is capable of much malice—once pay her attention, and you are her servant in public forever and a day and she will cause you to rue any slackened fervor. My visit promises the usual deadly dull routine, but thank heavens, need not endure more than five

days. Ethel is here, *en grande* evidence, absorbing my mother, until one can almost read the words '*la place est prise*' in her triumphant expression. Bertram has at last bloomed forth as an undergraduate at Oxford, and the other bud is blossoming as acknowledged niece, making her first social bow at the county ball, with Ethel, who carries her off to-morrow to Thornycroft. I am wondering what induced Ethel to take this step—why go out of one's way for an illegitimate niece? It is bad enough to possess one. But the Lord only knows why she should be flaunted in the world's face. I am writing near the window, to catch a glimpse of the sea and be inspired thereby, but, unfortunately, I never am inspired to order. Besides, cold salt water at a distance is less vivifying than the tiniest glass of sparkling Cliquot. By the way, what an elastic old humbug that 'Veuve' is. Think of the sham apotheosis of common grape juice under the borrowed glory of her name. I forgive her—or them, or it, or whatever circulates lying labels, when they mean for you a golden nectar. I take this to the post myself, so no curious eyes may read the address in my bold handwriting, 'Sir Lester Barristable, Bart., St. George's Club, London.' I can hear the hue

and cry. The worthy duke exclaims: 'What! correspond with a man who spends twice as much as he owns!' The good duchess cries: 'Alas! intimate with a man whose name has been linked with Gaiety girls?' and mild Ethel murmurs: 'Are you two trying to be engaged indefinitely?' and my heart answers, 'A poor man or a rich man, a devil-I-care-man, no matter what manner or sort, since we love each other.' Alack, my Lester, why are you not rich? Or why do I need more than my income permits me to spend? Still, the world will wag spite of our souls' wishes, and we must wait till the fickle goddess smiles on us before we are one in name as we are in all else.

"Yours in trust,

"BEATRICE."

VII.

TRIXIE dawned upon her cousin's horizon at Thornycroft like a veritable fairy princess. She had not seen the children since the six trooped into the playroom at Strathways one memorable morning, when they arrived *en masse* to spend some days with their grandparents. There were five girls and a boy, who was the youngest in the family. The eldest daughter was sweet and shy with her seventeen years, blue eyes and fair hair. Her mother was not going to introduce her in society for at least two years, so Trixie felt quite elderly beside this quiet cousin, though only a few months older, and came out of her dreams and solitude to the happy chatter of six young people who perforce warmed her nature and stilled the sarcasm which, caught from her Aunt Beatrice, too often burned on her lips. A busy week sped, golden days full of sweet nothing, strolls, drives, and above all, the united energies of the girls on the question of chiffon, for a new dress had been ordered for the ball. Trixie

often looked back upon that week as a respite—a little moment of breathing before the sirocco blast left her for a while panting breathless on the sands of life, and she wondered 'if she had fully appreciated the kindly atmosphere of home affection which enveloped her.

On the eventful night, when Trixie sailed downstairs with a little flush of anticipated pleasure on her cheeks and her eyes sparkling like black diamonds, Sir Charles Layman thought that any parent might be proud of such a daughter. He had not entirely responded to his wife's wish of chaperoning the girl, but her personality had made itself felt, and notwithstanding a certain wilfulness, he felt attracted toward his handsome niece. Trixie, in the midst of her elation, could not help noticing that her aunt ignored the fact of this being the girl's first ball. She simply introduced her as "my niece who is staying with me." For some undefined reason, Trixie resented this. It was the first thorn in her wreath of roses that night. She had just begun to fill her programme, after having had a half-dozen men presented to her, when a voice at her shoulder made her almost drop her fan and flowers.

"Harold! and how did you get here?"

"By the train—slightly too far to walk from Oxford."

Trixie made no attempt to conceal her pleasure and surprise at the unexpected meeting.

"Your college authorities must be exceedingly accommodating."

"Do you think I would have missed being at your first ball, Trixie?" he whispered.

Of course, it was all nonsense, but she could not refrain from a girlish thrill of pride at the knowledge the words conveyed. For three joyous hours Trixie footed it with the fleetest, and many eyes turned a second time to watch the graceful figure and slender white throat, around which was clasped a string of pearls, the duchess' latest gift. Had not her mirror, nor the frankness of her young cousins, yet betrayed to Trixie the happy truth that she was beautiful that night, the admiration expressed in Harold's eyes would have told her. Toward the end of the evening, Trixie and Harold wandered into the conservatory; she was leaning back in a chair, fanning herself slowly, and wishing the ball could last indefinitely; her partner had gone to get her an ice, when bits of talk floated to her ears from adjoining rooms, at first vague words so disconnected that she heard them mechanically without attaching sense to their import. Presently she heard her aunt's name, and without intending to play at eavesdropping, caught straggling sentences.

"Yes, rather a fine-looking girl."

"But I am surprised at Lady Ethel all the same."

"I suppose if the duke and duchess acknowledge them, there's nothing to be said."

"Still, I am not going to ask her to my dance next week; it might be awkward for my girls, you know, in London next season."

"Her mother was his cook, or housekeeper, or something, wasn't she?"

"No, my dear; I think she was a variety actress."

"Anyway, one thing is positive; they never had even the benefit of Gretna Green."

"Fancy naming her after her aunt, Lady Beatrice Millbanks!"

"What a stiletto for that lady's side!"

When Harold rejoined Trixie a moment later, he found her standing with one hand resting on a chair and the other nervously grasping her fan and programme. One glance at her pale face and he exclaimed:

"Trixie, you are ill; what can I do for you?"

"Take me away from here, Harold; I entreat you."

In the sma' wee hours of that night, Lady Ethel sat ensconced in her favorite bedroom chair, in close confabulation with her husband.

"Think of such a climax to a girl's first ball," moaned Lady Ethel.

"Best at a ball, where she at least has her little girlish triumphs to console her."

"But the worst of it is that Trixie refuses to be comforted. I know that she is now in her room, breaking her heart; what is to be done, Charles?"

The wife's eyes were beseeching a solution to her difficulties. Sir Charles Layman tugged at his gray mustache and knit his brows with annoyance. He personally resented this idle talk of the ballroom, thinking that the prestige of his wife's favor should have shielded any guest of theirs from open comment. Below his breath he was anathematizing the two gossips, who had been easily recognized from Trixie's curt and sarcastic description, for, as she left the conservatory, leaning on Harold's loyal arm, her innocent white *débutante* dress had actually brushed the somber satin folds of the two matrons.

"What is to be done, Charles?" repeated Lady Ethel.

The masculine mind, having reviewed the situation, issued this fiat: "Gertrude must anticipate her coming out by two seasons!"

"But how will that assist Trixie?"

"Give a ball for Gertrude during her cousin's visit here; let Trixie receive with her, and forget to invite those two scandalmongers."

And so it came about that demure little Gertrude was unexpectedly launched upon the county society, with all the freshness of her seventeen summers forming a charming contrast to the brilliant beauty of her dark-eyed cousin. Trixie, appreciating her aunt's unspoken efforts to heal her wounded pride, summoned all her courage to dominate with her youth and beauty whatever odium society might cast at her through the stigma of her birth.

Thornycroft, *en fête*, with Lady Ethel and Sir Charles Layman dispensing hospitalities, brought all the county to the ball, save two elderly tabbies, who sat at home with their tribe of unmarried daughters, bemoaning the luckless chatter which had chained their girls' feet to the parental parquet, while eligible elder sons were whirling more favored damsels.

To the duchess, in alluding to this episode, Lady Ethel wrote: "Trixie will not discuss the matter with you; she is bearing it bravely, though I see that the sting still rankles. Let her have another change when you can."

Therefore the haphazard gossip which reached

Trixie's ears at her first ball not only gave her a second ball and even more brilliant introduction into society, but landed her in the Oxford Eights; much to the delight of the two knights, whose anticipations of her success were more than realized.

Though not willing to confess it even to himself, Harold felt an inward pang of dissatisfaction at seeing how easily his lovely lady held court among all his friends. Both he and Bertram had noticed a slight change in Trixie's manner toward them. Though scarcely tangible enough to pass comment upon, it was there from the moment she stepped out of the railway coach with the duchess, who had accompanied her from London. Dean Stanfield, hearing of the intended visit to Oxford, had prevailed with her grace to allow Trixie to accept his hospitality. So, after gladdening the young men's hearts with a flying inspection of their rooms, the duchess left her granddaughter with the motherly Mrs. Stanfield and her lively girls. It was not until they were actually on their way to the river that Bertram had a chance of a *tête-à-tête* with his sister. They had gone ahead of the rest and were sauntering down the Broad Walk. He wondered how he would probe her, and if this subtle change arose from

any trouble gleaned at Thornycroft. Harold had related the incident of Trixie's unaccountable retreat from the county ball, and not having the keynote to the situation, her devoted knights were unable to guess the truth.

"Some love affair, perhaps," thought Bertram, glancing at the handsome face beside him.

"Are you not keeping something from me?" he asked at last, tentatively.

"What secret could I have from you?" But the eyes belied her lips. A flash of intuition became revelation.

"Oh! Trixie, so you know, too—when—how?"

"At the ball."

"Tell me all, dearie."

The tenderness in his tone broke down flood-gates within her. His sister poured forth in a torrent of words all she had repressed for months. Bertram's sympathy was balm to her sore spirit; she heard with interest the account of his first knowledge of their parents' love and folly, but all her brother's philosophical remarks fell short of their mark. She seemed bitterness personified in petticoats. Bertram remonstrated:

"Because some of the juice was squeezed out

of your orange is no reason to think that it is sucked dry and only fit to be pitched into the gutter. Life still offers its golden fruit, fresh and round, for you to hold. I wish you would talk it all over with Harold; he helped me through many a dark hour."

"Not with him, Bertie; he's too near home; but I did think of Paul Herbert."

"He, too, was much to me; he will give you thoughts to treasure; he is more wonderful than ever, Trixie. Do you remember how we raved over him the first time he flashed across our existence?"

She had not forgotten, and was pleased when her brother suggested arranging a meeting between them. In the midst of hard work, the clergyman responded, and was rewarded by his exertion to gratify Bertram by the pleasure he experienced in renewing acquaintance with Trixie, but was struck with the attitude the girl took in the matter. She seemed determined to draw compensation out of society for certain rights defrauded her and openly declared her one ambition was to secure money and position and snap her fingers at the world after that. Paul Herbert, with his wide toleration of people's prejudices and foibles, sympathized with the cause that prompted such

feelings, but urged their uselessness. "Altruism and honest Christian philanthropy is worth more than gratified pride and worldly ambitions." His magnetic manner made itself felt. Trixie gazed into his dark gray eyes and knew truth was there; the tones of his clear, ringing voice chimed truth and nothing but truth. His slight, tall figure seemed too frail for the massive soul it bore. The man was an embodiment of enthusiasm, and mind over matter was the text his personality preached.

Perhaps it was Paul Herbert's advent that precipitated Harold's wooing. He felt out of tune when Trixie's spirit seemed to sing in unison with his friend's, and the knowledge that the burden of her parents' fault had reached her own young shoulders, made him long ardently to share her each and every sorrow. The night before she left Oxford there was an informal dance at the dean's. Trixie was the pride of the evening; Harold watched her stately beauty, with a lover's worship in his honest blue eyes, as she leaned on his arm and he felt her sweet warmth near his breast, while her breath softly fanned his burning cheek. Prudence unfolded her wings and flew away. His whole soul aflame with a great

love, he told her what she half surmised, and with passionate appeal asked that their future lives should be one. He put his all to the test—and met with blankness and despair. Trixie curtly and emphatically refused him.

VIII.

STRATHWAYS lake had been frozen two days, but the duke, having tested the ice, considered it still unsafe to venture upon, and cautioned his gamekeepers to notify the neighbors who might come to the park with the expectation of skating. A light fall of snow had powdered the ground and glistened in the morning sun as Bertram walked through the woods on his way to inspect the lake. Trixie for a wonder was not with him, having gone to try a new horse. It was Christmas week, and Bertram felt particularly in tune with the season. He was at home to remain indefinitely until the duke decided some plans for his future career.

His college days were already a delightful dream of the past; he had quitted the university with honor and made many warm friends during his college days. As Bertram passed the "Roost" he smiled and sighed to see its dilapidated condition, with a piece of the roof caved in and a little pile of frozen snow at the entrance to the tree house, where he and Trixie had spent so many happy hours.

"If the ice would only hold," he thought, "we could try it this afternoon and have some of the girls and Harold down from the rectory."

Reaching the edge of the lake, he was surprised to see a female figure in the distance, skating across the lower end. He walked out a few yards and decided that the lake was unsafe, when he made signs to the stranger, who was skating with apparent unconcern, but she took no notice and glided off toward the center. Bertram then shouted to her to come ashore, but she apparently neither heard nor saw him. "There will be an accident," he exclaimed, "and what on earth is to be done then!" As he spoke, the lady seemed to realize her danger, for she turned rapidly around and began skating toward the bank where Bertram stood. He renewed his warning, which she heard, and as he watched her approach, with some anxiety, the catastrophe he expected happened. There was an ominous crack; the slight figure flew forward and fell; by the time she had recovered her feet, the gap had widened and the dark water of the lake almost entirely encircled her. Bertram started with dismay, but his gallantry instinctively prompted a rescue. Walking out cautiously, with the ice bending beneath his feet, he neared the gap.

"Come carefully as near as you can to the edge," he called out. "The longer you wait, the worse it will be."

"But what can I do then?"

"Jump before the break widens; the ice is more solid on this side and I think will support both of us, and I will catch you."

Though evidently much alarmed, his listener followed instructions, and a moment later he had his arms around a pretty, fur-trimmed waist, and was dragging a young lady of considerable beauty toward the shore. In jumping she had broken the edge of the ice and one little foot slipped into the water. They scrambled to *terra firma*, where Bertram deposited his fair *incognito*. Shivering with cold and fright, she gasped her thanks, but emphatically declined the eagerly offered hospitality of Strathways.

"But you will never be able to get home in this condition," he remonstrated, wondering where she lived.

"Oh, it's only a short distance, and a slight wetting and fright will not hurt me; it was my own fault in evading the duke's orders; I had heard at the lodge that general skating was prohibited until to-morrow, but fancied that ice which could not bear the weight of the county, might be able to hold—me," with a little pause

before the last word and a childlike laugh that sounded to Bertram like the silvery cadence of a wild bird's note.

He was so absorbed with this unexpected apparition of daintiness, with the melting blue eyes now flashing upward with beseeching glances, now veiled by silken lashes, with the delicate coloring of the Mignon face, with the hair that glinted like burnished gold beneath a fur cap, the little tip-tilted nose and the milk-white teeth, that he stood in absolute silence for a moment, lost in contemplation of so many charms.

Recalled into the actual present by the consciousness of thanks being poured into his ear, he hastily cut her short by saying:

"At least allow me to escort you part of the way home."

"I could not think of troubling you further; it is only a step from the gate," came the quick reply.

"Your steps must be unusually long ones," said Bertram, with a smile of superior knowledge of the fact that the nearest post town was two miles away and the pretty stranger certainly did not come from any of the nearby estates.

Translating the smile, she laughed in answer, "You have forgotten Clovermead."

"Is it let at last, and are you living there?"

"We are."

"Then we are near neighbors, and I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again."

"Of course, we shall meet again; the world is small."

"And here you are sitting still, taking cold," he said, with solicitude in his voice, born of the new interest he suddenly felt. "You ought to be running about and keep warm."

He had taken off her skates, and stood holding them in his hands. She tossed her head coquettishly:

"You are quite right," rising to her feet, and regaining the skates, "so again thanking you for your kindness, I will run away home;" and suiting the action to her words, before he could recover from his surprise she had started off on a run.

However much Bertram might have wished to prolong the conversation, he felt that under the circumstances it would be difficult to pursue this fleeting Diana; besides, Clovermead would never close its doors against any one from Strathways. Of course he would see her again, and shortly too, he hoped, and with this consoling reflection, he returned to the house to find his family already at luncheon. The Rev.

Mr. Jewett, having dropped in for a morning call, had been persuaded to break his fast again, and was retailing the current news of the county, to Lady Beatrice's edification, who had suddenly decided that she needed a country Christmas, and invaded the parental domains with a cart-load of boxes and a clever Italian maid, pronounced a treasure by her mistress because she was a born *coiffeur*, but who to the staid Scotch servants represented the Red Woman, with a flavor of Lucretia Borgia in her subtle Italian grace.

In answer to a chorus of inquiries as to why he was so late, as promptness was the order of the day at Strathways, Bertram modestly related the story of the unknown lady and the broken ice.

"Clovermead!" exclaimed the rector. "Of course, he had forgotten to tell that it had been rented for a term of years to Captain Maitland and his family. They liked the place but were complaining already of lack of room. The house was not very large and the family seemed to be overflowing."

Bertram was wondering which member he had met, and rather consciously began asking a description of the ladies, when Lady Beatrice quenched his inquisitiveness by leveling her

lorgnette at him and inquiring "by what number on his list this fair damsel would be represented."

Bertram, with the sensitiveness of untried passion, resented as something almost sacrilegious this flying shaft of ridicule, directed at a budding sentiment. He joined in the general laugh, but carefully eschewed further allusion to his recent encounter with one of the new neighbors. He did not wish prosaic badinage to dim the oriole which encircled this already idealized adventure. In Trixie's eyes, at least, her beloved Bertram loomed up as a small hero, and she felt sure he had not emphasized the risk he had run in rescuing one of the Maitland's household. To satisfy herself on that point, she induced the duchess, at an early day, to leave cards at Clovermead. The ladies were not at home and Trixie lost the sought-for opportunity, but within a few days the visit was returned. Trixie again, to her regret, missed seeing their new neighbors. She and Bertram were off on a long tramp. When they returned Lady Beatrice, who had received the Maitlands, as the duchess was not feeling very well, was so tantalizing and confusing in her description of the "Maitland avalanche," as she denominated their guests, that Bertram, with the new

admiration filling head and heart, was shy about asking particulars, but hearing that he had been cordially invited to Clovermead, lost no time in setting his doubts at rest as to the identity of his heroine.

He had heard that the family consisted of Captain and Mrs. Maitland, their children, and an unlimited supply of Mrs. Maitland's unmarried sisters, who made Clovermead their headquarters, as their parents were dead. Captain Maitland's father was a great friend of Sir Charles Layman; hence the link with the Beaulieu family. The grounds of Clovermead were extremely pretty, boasting endless shady walks and picturesque arbors; the old orchard reached down to rare pasture lands, where cattle browsed knee-deep in richest grass and clover. The house, an unpretentious, rambling edifice, had been evolved by its original owner from its first narrow limits to the present dimensions very much as a child builds a card house, by adding a floor here and a room there. It had been dismantled and practically uninhabited since the death of its owner ten years before, and Bertram felt surprised at its metamorphosis. The gray, cobwebby effect of an untenanted house had vanished under the painter's touch and housemaid's broom, while

the whole place was bright with the vivifying influence of feminine minds. He was gazing round the long, low-ceiled drawing-room and wondering whose the influence which had filled the rooms with grace and beauty, when a silvery voice at his elbow startled him, and he turned and found a pretty white hand extended in greeting by the lady who had filled his thoughts for the past few days.

For the first time Bertram regretted his hesitancy in ascertaining more exactly which of Mrs. Maitland's sisters he had rescued. The next moment all was forgotten in the pleasure of finding himself actually in close conversation with this most charming of women. She was arrayed in an unconventional but most becoming gown of silver gray plush, trimmed with rich fur. A curious Oriental girdle clasped her slim waist, which Bertram wondered he had had the audacity to touch. She was such an absolute contrast to his splendid, statuesque sister that no comparison could be drawn between them. Hitherto most of his admirations had flickered up and died like a flash in the pan when their objects were confronted with Trixie's radiancy. He did not attempt to analyze his feelings, but gave way to the mere sensuous enjoyment of the moment under the influence

of this enchanting personality. The little lady sank back among the cushions of the ottoman, showing the prettiest foot and ankle in the world. They talked of their first meeting, of their neighbors and though a third person could hardly have cavilled at anything that was actually said, yet there was the unspoken *entente cordiale* between them which quickened Bertram's pulses and caused his dark eyes to shine. The clock seemed bewitched and marked an hour before Bertram realized that even a few minutes had passed. Just as his elation had reached its topmost bent, a tall, military looking man entered the room, and his companion rose and placidly introduced him:

"Let me present you, Mr. Sinclair, to my husband, Captain Maitland."

IX.

MRS. JEWETT was sorely disappointed to find that the flower of her flock had not realized his mother's fond anticipations. From the trend of his youthful thoughts she had always pictured him as the successor of his father in St. Stephen's pulpit, but after mature deliberation and many earnest talks with the Rev. Paul Herbert, Harold had concluded that the ministry was not his vocation. His books on theology were replaced by the *materia medica* and all his energies were directed toward becoming an ardent disciple of Esculapius. Bertram, who had followed his friend's career with great interest, was glad to feel that after a natural phase of depression and melancholy, following upon Trixie's refusal, Harold's healthy mind recovered its elasticity, and to all intents and purposes, he was his normal self again, absorbed in his work, hearty in his play, for both he and Bertram were keen at all outdoor sports.

With the inconsistency of a young woman

still unversed in the ways of the world, Trixie secretly resented the sudden calm which succeeded the tempestuous passion that at one time seemed to threaten the upheaval of Harold's philosophical existence. Her brother had written to her very plainly upon the subject when he had ascertained the truth from his friend, after her departure from Oxford. In answering her brother's letters, she ignored all reference to the matter, and gradually he ceased to mention it. By the time they all met again, Harold had successfully matured his plans and was full of enthusiasm for his prospective work in London. He had made many friends while at college, among them a son of the eminent court physician, Sir Julian Drayton. On more than one occasion Harold had been able to render signal services to young Drayton, who was not very strong, either physically or morally, and the son's appreciation of Harold's kindness had reached the father. On a visit to London, Sir Julian recognized the strength of Harold's nature and began to take an interest in the young man's ambitions, and when Harold was about to attempt the thankless task of opening an office without having first obtained the necessary practice, he was surprised and overwhelmed by an offer from Sir Julian to begin

practice under him. If anything could have reconciled the rectory with the change in Harold's intentions, it was the knowledge of his successful entrance upon life.

Though Trixie did not regret her decision, she experienced a certain thrill of satisfaction in knowing that she had been and perhaps still was, the object of Harold's admiration. Seeing him the center of his family's adoration and realizing how well he stood in the esteem of Strathways, she felt that an offer of marriage from such a man could only have been taken as a compliment. Harold was at the rectory, enjoying a short home-coming at the time the little episode on the ice occurred. When Trixie at last met the Maitlands at an informal evening at Strathways, she could not fail to notice the marked efforts made by the captain's pretty wife to absorb Harold's attention, and how her unmarried sisters posed and preened their plumage with a determination to please, worthy of the eldest son of a lord at least; but then, Trixie admitted to herself, Harold was certainly a fine specimen of English manhood, with his admirable physique, standing six feet two in his stockings. Bertram, who had not seen the fascinating little *chatelaine* of Clovermead since he beat a hasty retreat from her too

charming presence on discovering that Captain Maitland had married the youngest and prettiest of the five sisters, did not regret her open preference for Harold Jewett's society, for it distracted Trixie's keen discernment from his own embarrassment, which he feared would be visible to the little circle. Mrs. Maitland's attitude toward himself was easy nonchalance which made him wonder if he had been a fool to dream that any other construction but that of *bon camaradie* could be placed on her manner toward him at their last *tête-à-tête*, and when a few days later he saw her driving with Dickie Tudor in his smart tandem, Bertram became convinced that he had exaggerated the state of his own feelings and was depriving himself of innocent pleasure when refraining from visiting Clovermead. As frosty weather still continued, there had been some reunions on the Strathways lake and Bertram had watched Mrs. Maitland's *svelte* figure flitting by in her jaunty skating costume, and jealously noted how the masculine portion of the community seized every available opportunity of flocking to her side. One afternoon, as he was meditating how to approach her without attracting attention, she darted away from the group of skaters and skimmed lightly over to where he was cutting a solitary figure eight, remarking saucily:

“Well, Sir Doleful; what have I done to offend your highness?”

Her jolly manner dispelled the last doubt in Bertram's mind. For answer he took her hand and skated with her to the other end of the lake. So swiftly they flew, she could hardly catch her breath to remonstrate against being carried off from her various escorts. Before they returned, she had invited him to spend the next afternoon with her at Clovermead, slightly emphasizing the fact that it would be very kind of him to take pity on her loneliness, as the whole family was deserting her for the day.

Before Harold returned to London, he experienced a vague feeling of uneasiness about Bertram's intimacy at Clovermead. Mrs. Maitland's high soprano voice sounded so well with Bertram's tenor, and the frequent little impromptu musicales necessarily followed numerous private rehearsals. With four unmarried sisters in the house, it seemed absurd to cavil at a young man spending much time in their society, particularly when there was little else in the way of amusement at that season. So Harold smothered the new-born fear, resolving that it should never see the light of day unless Trixie, with the quick intuition of affection for her brother, sounded the first note of suspicion.

As the winter months passed there was more gayety than usual in the county. Easter fell early that year, and the young people were arranging some theatricals for Clovermead during Easter week. Of course, Bertram and Trixie were to take part, but the latter found herself cast for a play including many characters, while her brother was to act in a short sketch, in which he and Mrs. Maitland figured as the hero and heroine.

It was just about this time, when the crocuses began to show their colors above the brown earth, and the snowdrops raised their timid heads in Strathways woods, that a breath, a whisper, became common talk with the first scent of spring. Who first touched the treadle of Dame Gossip's spinning wheel, or who spun the first threads of the little rumors, history proclaimeth not. A small strand here, a small strand there, and soon a substantial yarn was spun.

In the olden days our great-grandmothers did not disdain to twirl the distaff or tread the spinning wheel. Their slender hands—dust long ago—spun many threads which figured in the doweries of their daughters and outfits of their sons.

As nimble fingers slacken in their zeal, the

busy brains of our excitable age spin more than ever. Cerebral threads weave themselves into durable stuff, sweet and sound, graceful and picturesque, or else knot and snarl themselves into a rotten fabric of mere falsehoods and frauds.

Since the first gossip of the cave dwellers, beside their woodland springs, society has delighted in its spinnings of a baser sort, and county chatter exceeds even the venom of the superannuated fop who calls of an evening to spin out the latest *on dit* of the clubs, and picks up new threads to add to his smutty snarl.

David sang:

“ Let lying lips be put to silence,”

And Shakespeare wrote:

“ What being so strong
Can tie the gall up in the slanderous tongue?”

Yet neither psalmist nor bard have stayed lips from lying nor the gall of slander from embittering lives. Good mothers, who pin their faith to their own ugly ducklings, dreaming of them as possible future swans, are ever alert to resent the slightest scoff at their brood, yet will sit still and smilingly hear the children of others traduced; and good men, who are

ready to knock down the spinner of the smallest yarn against their own spouses, will exchange a knowing glance, indulge in a wink or a lifting of the eyebrows over the gossip about some other man's wife.

What a gulf stretches between "mine" and "thine!" Yet the "thine" is but the "mine" of our brother.

When the sum and substance of the neighbors' talk drifted to the duchess' 5-o'clock tea table, Lady Ethel, who had brought Gertrude on for the theatricals, thought it was a pity people wasted so much time in acquiring materials for mere gossip, as the most elastic of brains had its limitations.

"If we fill ours with vapid nothings," she continued, "we have no room for truths and beauty. So many people occupy their minds with abnormal and useless subjects, until their brain cells are stuffed with monstrosities like a penny side-show. It is the old story of the bad and good girls in the fairy tale; pearls, and rubies, toads and snakes of speech still drop from rosy lips, but unfortunately the reptiles outnumber the jewels."

The visitors, humdrum county matrons, stared at the aunt. The duchess jingled her little household keys nervously and relocked

the tea caddy. Her mannerisms and small economies seemed to increase with her years, and Lady Ethel had felt quite anxious after a separation of some months to notice how pale and frail the duchess had grown. To his home circle, the breath against Bertram was gall and wormwood, but they reasoned among themselves that it was mere jealousy of his good looks and general superiority which caused the petty talk. Yet notwithstanding that Strathways negatived the possibility of there being more than mere superficial friendship between Bertram and the fascinating Mrs. Maitland, the story spread. In a letter from the rectory, it reached Harold's ears, and he shared his anxiety with the Rev. Paul Herbert, who was passing a few hours in London at the time. The young clergyman shrugged his shoulders and said:

"How impossible it is to instil sense into idlers. When I hear a story of this sort I always think of the paraphrase:

" ' But Satan finds for idle minds
Some mischief still to do.' "

Alas, for the precious minutes and hours lost in such useless spinning, when the minds might be busy weaving fairest fabrics of golden thoughts and deeds, which would outlive this

fading mortality and change to baptismal robes of a newer and purer life, but the dull spiders spin on, each in his own flimsy web, and their labor is vain, spent on perishable things, which must with the spinner, too, die and be buried."

The two friends agree that Trixie must be sounded on the subject. In the meantime, like a valiant sister, she was fighting Bertram's battles. The day of the theatricals drew near, and Bertram one soft spring morning went for a final rehearsal with Mrs. Maitland. He found her in a rather excitable mood.

"What has disturbed your little ladyship?" he inquired as soon as they were alone.

"Surely, you must know," she burst out impetuously; "they are talking about us."

"Let them talk," said Bertram recklessly.

After the first plunge into this new phase of life, he drifted on, meeting the coquettish allurements of his pretty neighbor more than halfway, deafening his ears to the warnings of conscience, and putting aside the unwelcome knowledge that his grandparents and Trixie, Harold, and Paul Herbert, and the few near and dear to him would absolutely disapprove of his new and perilous friendship.

"But I don't want them to make remarks about me," pouting the pretty red lips.

"A woman who is so desperately charming must expect unkind criticisms from her less favored sisters."

"But, my dear boy, it hurts me to know that people say unkind things."

"You know I would guard you from them if I could," and he lifted the delicate white hand to his lips.

They were standing by the open window, looking out upon the garden, where primroses were struggling into existence and mating birds chirped happy spring greetings from the branches. She did not withdraw her hand, but lifted her baby face toward his towering above her. The spell of the season was upon Bertram, who promptly stooped and kissed her.

She blushed a little and spread out her two hands before her, saying, "Don't!" in a tone that implied "Do." The rehearsal was forgotten, likewise the fact that there was a Captain Maitland and two small Maitlands in the background.

As Bertram hurried from the house, not wishing to meet any of the family that morning, he felt a strange elation of spirits, as if he had come out of a crisis. Though nothing had passed between them that the whole troupe of sisters might not have witnessed, he felt that

the little scene just enacted was but the prelude to a drama which might prove more tragic than comic. Reaching Strathways, he found his two best friends pacing the terrace walk with Trixie. Their advent was as unexpected as at that moment it seemed to him—unwelcome. “Of course, they meant to please him by coming to see him act, but—” and he could not finish the sentence even to himself. They were joined by the duchess, who, leaning on her grandson’s arm, walked slowly up and down with the young people.

“Sir Julian sends his kindest greetings to you, duchess,” said Harold.

Trixie noticed with trepidation the start her grandmother gave, and how her hand instinctively went to her side. She had confessed to her granddaughter that all mention of Sir Julian naturally brought painful associations, but Trixie did not like to see how physically affected the duchess was by slight annoyances.

Next day the theatricals took place and the county pronounced them “rattling good for amateurs,” in the words of young Tudor. Bertram had not seen Mrs. Maitland again since their last attempted rehearsal until he joined her on this eventful night and acted the part of a lover with great spirit and passion. In fact

the scene between the two had been so realistic that Trixie felt herself growing hot and cold and dared not glance at Harold, who sat next to her. Directly after the performance, the fair hostess, still in the costume worn in the play, entertained the assembled guests, and Bertram had no opportunity of exchanging a word with her alone. It was not until they were leaving that he managed to whisper:

"When may I see you again?"

"To-morrow at three, in the woods at the head of the lake," and the languishing look in the bewitching blue eyes signified a lovers' tryst.

Putting his conscience behind him, Bertram followed Gertrude and Trixie out into the cool night air, unable to find a word of response to her running comment on the success of the evening. They had hardly passed the gates of Clovermead, when they were met by one of their house servants.

"Surely not any bad news?" gasped Trixie.

"Her grace is very ill; the doctor has been sent for."

With heavy hearts the young people returned to Strathways, their worst forebodings fulfilled when they reached the house. The duchess suffered from heart failure and was not ex-

pected to live through the night. Lady Ethel, at her mother's bedside, caught a few broken sentences:

"It was for their sakes; you know, Ethel, that all I have saved beside my income goes untouched to his two children." And again: "It was for their sakes that I once lied."

Toward morning she asked for Bertram alone. Bending down over the delicate face he had learned since a little child to love so dearly, he saw a look of entreaty come into her eyes.

"What is it, dear grandmother?" he asked.

"Bertram, I meant it for the best; forgive me."

"You have always acted for the best regarding our welfare," he replied quickly.

"I told you she was dead—when you and Trixie came here, you had one parent living."

"And now?"

The duchess gasped faintly, looking up into his face—"And now—" but his question was never answered, for even as her pale lips tried to formulate the next sentence, her life's flame was flickering out.

X.

"O primavera gioventu del l'anno,
O gioventu, primavera della vita,"

SANG a sweet, fresh voice above the head of a pedestrian, who, as he walked along, cast rapid glances right and left, vainly trying to discover the whereabouts of the singer. On one side rose an irregular ledge of rocks, sprinkled with cactus and roses, intermingled with great bunches of variegated geraniums, trailing vines and tufts of spotted grass, and delicate lichens; behind these, as far as the eye could see, olive trees were climbing to reach the bright blue sky. On the opposite side of the path were more olive trees, sloping down indefinitely to the railroad below, and still beyond lay the sea, sparkling under the splendor of an Italian sun. Sir Lester Barristable had left his trap outside the dilapidated old gate that stood invitingly open at the entrance of this unexplored road from the highway. He was afraid of finding himself in a *cul de sac* where a skittish mare might not be turned

easily. So his companion held the reins while he followed the winding path a short distance.

Again the sweet girlish voice broke the silence of a hot afternoon. Piqued by the persistent invisibility of the songster, Sir Lester paused, and in his best Italian exclaimed:

"Will the illustrious cantatrice favor a poor stranger with information as to whether this beautiful road leads out again to the main drive to Mentone?"

A moment's silence, and then some bushes among the rocks parted, and a winsome face peeped out:

"This is a private road, but you are welcome to traverse it, signore; it will bring you to the highway, if you keep to the right and do not turn up toward Villa Millefleurs."

"I beg a thousand pardons," exclaimed Sir Lester, in French, "but am I not speaking with Mademoiselle Millefleurs?"

"You are," she replied in the same language.

Sir Lester took off his hat and made her a sweeping foreign bow. He had heard a great deal lately about old Millefleurs' heiress. Report said that the merchant had left a very large fortune, which his still young and handsome widow held in trust for their daughter. He glanced a moment at the graceful girlish

figure, which now emerged from the bushes perched on a rock a few feet above him, and decided that she was not as beautiful as report had painted her. Aloud he said:

"The fates are propitious to-day; I am indeed fortunate at being allowed to meet the young lady whose charms and merit are so greatly appreciated throughout the whole Riviera."

The girl drew back a little. Her manner changed suddenly. She had responded to his question with childlike frankness, apparently exhibiting no concern at meeting a strange, good-looking man of the world, but the moment his voice assumed the conventional complimentary tone, a shrinking shyness seemed to envelop Mademoiselle Millefleurs, as the delicate morning mists shrouded her beloved hills. Sir Lester saw his mistake at once and endeavored to regain the ground he had lost:

"Your view is so lovely here, mademoiselle," he said, eliminating all trace of personal allusion from his voice, "that it is well worth the climb, and with your permission I will drive through your grounds."

"You left your carriage at the gate?" she asked with naïve curiosity.

"Yes, and the lady whom I am driving

awaits me; so, thanking you for your courtesy I will rejoin her."

A moment or two later, as he drove by the spot where he had left the girl, Lady Beatrice's sharp eyes scanned the rocks in vain; Made-moiselle Millefleurs had vanished.

"You say she is not pretty?"

"Not as pretty as I expected; report had painted her a sort of wingless angel; I met an artist who raved over her exquisite coloring."

His companion asked no more questions about Mlle. Millefleurs, but as they drove past the avenue leading to the villa, glanced inquisitively at a graceful figure receding down the path. The girl was dressed in white and swinging a large straw hat by its blue ribbons. Short pale golden curls haloed a sweet face with large dreamy eyes. She carried herself well and walked with the freedom born of country life and loose clothes. As she disappeared from view, *apropos* of nothing at all Lady Beatrice remarked:

"Did I tell you, *mon ami*, that my good-looking nephew is going to honor Mentone with his presence?"

"It will be a bore having him here just now. When does he arrive and where will he stay?"

"He expects to be at Mentone this week, and will patronize the Hotel des Anglais."

"Perhaps I had better take a run off to San Remo for a few days."

There was not regret enough in his voice to satisfy her.

"Will it be absolutely necessary?"

"Can we be too careful, *cara mia*?"

Lady Beatrice was silent, but frowned as she looked across the acres of olive groves to the blue Mediterranean, and reflected that there had been a time when it was she, not Sir Lester, who had to preach caution. Returning to Monte Carlo, she found the following letter awaiting her:

"THORNYCROFT.

"DEAR B: As Trixie was growing pale with melancholy, I induced father to defer returning to Strathways for another month. He is nothing loath to linger in London and seems cheered by old friends; so I am bringing Trixie and Gertrude with me to Mentone to join Bertram, who goes there from Paris. If we run cross you in our wanderings, I venture a whisper in your ear—do not entice our nephew and niece into mischief. A word to the wise is enough. Am sending this to your banker in Paris and hope it may reach you soon.

"Your affectionate sister,

"ETHEL LAYMAN."

"There speaks the British matron," said

Lady Beatrice, handing the epistle to Sir Lester, as they sat sipping their coffee at the Café de Paris.

"How stupid of your sister. Her caution verily offers an inducement for a little sport. I should like to see your handsome niece trying her virgin luck at the tables."

"I don't wish you to have the chance." Something in his tone had jarred upon Lady Beatrice, and she flushed angrily. A retort from Sir Lester was imminent, when some one touched his shoulder:

"*Mon ami*, to think of finding you here!"

A tall, well-groomed man with red ribbon in his buttonhole was presented to Lady Beatrice, as Sir Lester's dear friend, the Count Jules de Villeneuve. The trio soon adjourned to the Casino, where they tried their chances at the gaming tables, with a little music thrown in, to satisfy Lady Beatrice that they were chiefly there for the concert.

That evening as Madame Millefleurs sat on her wide porch, watching the sun setting in the sea, while the moon was peering above the Alps, Etoile, with a sigh observed:

"Why cannot every one be good? It would simplify matters so much."

"What is passing through your foolish little

head, my dear daughter?" stroking the fair curls resting against her knee.

Etoile moved the low bench upon which she sat nearer to her mother, so she could lean an arm across her lap and hold one of her hands.

"If all the world were only like thee, *petite maman!*"

"The earth would resemble paper dolls, all cut to one pattern."

"Do not laugh, dearest. I am in earnest. Though I never want to know the details of evil I cannot remedy, I feel them near me at times, and they make me shudder."

"You are too sensitive, *chérie*."

"But they are so real—so near at times. To-day a stranger asked his way while I was on the rocks near the gate. He bowed low and felt that he was most polite. His eyes were bad. He did not really care, in his heart, whether he was polite or not—only to produce the impression of being so. Mother, most men seem the same; they polish their manners, but somehow they seem to be acting a part."

"Little philosopher, you are a severe critic. Come, we know some nice men. Mr. Duval, our banker, and his family are sincere and good people."

"Ah, they are our friends, and we love them

—but the strangers I would love, too, if they were but true. I want to stretch out my hand to all the world and cry ‘we are all God’s children; love me as I love you!’ ”

“Alas! dear Etoile; people would misunderstand you.”

“Because they have not been taught aright; they learn so much and are so wise, with their art and literature and commerce and politics, but seem to take no time to simply learn to love. Surely, *petite mère*; love should be like the moonlight on the sea, streaming straight from heaven, embracing all life’s waves below, silvering somber griefs, enhancing common joys and pure—ah! pure as Mary’s heart.”

Madame Millefleurs stooped and kissed the girl’s forehead in silence.

“Sweetest mother, tell me, can one love too much?” The violet eyes were lifted to the elder woman’s face.

“No, no; not as you will love, dear child.”

“Nor as thou canst love, *maman*.”

They spoke in French and the familiar “thee” and “thou” was softest music on Etoile’s lips.

“To-morrow, when all those second and third cousins of mine arrive, we cannot have our delicious evenings alone together. Ah, why do

girls ever want any home but their own? How can a husband ever fill a mother's place?"

"Some husbands can be far more to a girl than even her mother," but Madame Millefleurs knew what had prompted the remark. Her husband, her senior by more than twenty years, had been proud of his wife's beauty, but in daily life his manner, though courteous, was not tender or demonstrative.

"Not such a mother as thou art," said Etoile, positively; "to be with thee here, alone, with our loved sea bathed in silver light, stretching far away, and heaven's countless eyes twinkling peace into our souls—ah! *ma chérie* this is life at its best. I would like always to rest thus against thy knee, and feel thy love and God's around me."

XI.

IN most family hotels in the Riviera there are generally two or three guests who become *habitués* of the house, returning each winter as regularly as the season, and upon whom the proprietor learns to depend as a part of his regular income. Often they are neither titled nor rich, but they demand and hold special attention from landlord and servants, as the prerogative of their being permanent instead of transient visitors. In this particular, the Hotel des Anglais at Mentone was specially favored. Several English families and some stray spinsters and odd bachelors were always to be found there by the end of November. Sometimes delicate chests expelled them from London, home, fogs and respirators; sometimes lonely lodgings were eagerly substituted by the cheery comforts of a good hotel, and often tired housekeepers were glad of the chance to drop domestic cares and the bore of deciding between boiled and roast mutton for dinner.

Among those who frequented the Hotel des Anglais was a family of the name of Medkins. The mother was a widow, well on in years, with married daughters at home, and two single girls with her at Mentone, the younger of whom was rather frail, and the southern winter benefited her. For five years the Medkins arrived early and left late, and during the season gradually became acquainted with most of the English colony of the town. M. Emil Arbogast and his kind wife, considered them standbys in all emergencies. If an accident occurred, or sickness broke out in the hotel, they were generally the first to be informed, and Mrs. Medkins had sat by many a sick bed and helped many a stranger or servant, as the case might be. She was the head and front of the little *coterie* of permanent guests; a rather talkative and angular matron, embracing much shrewdness with a kind heart. She always wore black and a becoming widow's cap, with unimpeachable snowy streamers. Her two girls were fair and gentle, and old-fashioned enough to be extremely obedient to "mamma." Newcomers were always thoroughly discussed by the *coterie* before being admitted within its sacred limits, and generally Mrs. Medkin's verdict sufficed as an open sesame to the magic circle, but some-

times her sentiments upon the subject were voted down by a few narrow fogies, who, never noting anything beyond their nose-tips, were shocked at any unconventional act, and lay in wait, like veritable spiders, spinning poisoned webs out of airy nothings, to entangle erring flies, and once a new guest had forfeited the approval of this little set, he was regarded as a pariah, and avoided accordingly.

When Lady Ethel Layman, with Gertrude and her two cousins appeared on the scene, a flutter went through the *coterie*. There was no thought of trying such charming people before any little hotel tribunal. Mrs. Medkin and her satellites were on tiptoe of expectation and longing, to welcome the four arrivals with open arms, but to their surprise and disappointment, their well-meant efforts toward ingratiating themselves in the favor of a duke's daughter did not meet with eminent success. Lady Ethel was generally kind and courteous, but rarely remained in the public rooms. On one or two occasions, when waiting for her young people, she had chatted affably with some of the ladies, but beyond that, acquaintance seemed to end. The Laymans and Sinclairs had been at the Hotel des Anglais a week, when Lady Beatrice whirled in upon them one day.

"How you all can subsist in this poky place, when Nice and Monte Carlo are within reach, is beyond my comprehension."

Her sister explained that they did not find Mentone poky; on the contrary they pronounced it delightful.

"The house seems swarming with British mediocre respectability. How exhilarating to shock the crowd out of its habitual decorum!" The idea tickled Lady Beatrice's fancy so much that she lost no time in putting it into execution, and immediately telegraphed for maid and trunks from Monte Carlo.

Lady Ethel did not entirely approve of this addition to their party, having long ago decided that some relations were better apart. She feared her sister's influence on Bertram, who, amused at his aunt's wit and audacity of speech, let the momentary amusement she created efface the old childish dislike he once entertained for her. Besides, he had been surprised and touched by her attitude toward himself and Trixie when the duchess died. Lady Beatrice had been hastily summoned from London, and arrived truly shocked and, in the presence of death, for once humbled. In her erratic way she loved her quiet, sensitive, out-of-date mother. Nature at last asserted itself

in her heart. She wept bitterly and vowed she would be good friends with "the brats" for the future. During the dread blank that crept into Bertram and Trixie's lives on the loss of their grandmother, they turned instinctively to Lady Ethel for comfort, who would gladly have lingered at Strathways, but, her husband falling ill, called her home and then Lady Beatrice for once thought of others before herself and stayed on in the desolate household until the duke, looking ten years older, began to interest himself again in little outside matters. Though not demonstrative, and often dictatorial and exacting, he had nevertheless sincerely loved and admired his wife, and the severance of their almost daily companionship for fifty years was a blow from which it seemed doubtful he could ever recover. Bertram did not forget that their Aunt Beatrice's unquenchable spirits alone kept them all from sinking into a veritable slough of despond. He had felt kindly toward her ever since, not that she could ever take the place in his affection which Lady Ethel held, for she was shrined in an inner sanctum with the duchess, Trixie and the memory of an unknown mother.

After the funeral of the duchess, Bertram had sought to glean the end of the sentence

which death had withheld from him. The duke promptly dismissed the matter with a few words:

"Whatever my dear wife did, was for the best; I supposed your mother dead long go; it was better so, believe me."

Lady Ethel brought him a little light. "Yes, his mother was living when he and his sister were brought to Strathways, and a house-keeper who had known his father, called once to see the children while *en route* to their mother, who was very ill, but no definite place was mentioned. As nothing was heard from her since, the inference was that she was dead."

"Then I will find her grave."

It was at this moment, when, softened by recent sorrow, the young man felt gradually drawn toward his favorite aunt, that Lady Ethel, in her sweet, low voice, told him how certain rumors preyed upon her mother's health. She did not intimate that the gossip was believed, nor that any harm could proceed out of a friendship which under some circumstances might be most innocent. Bertram, conscience-stricken, felt as though the scales had fallen from his eyes. He marveled that he should have drifted so near a precipice, yet assured himself that without this catastrophe to recall

his wandering feet, he would have pulled up in time to save two foolish people from tumbling over altogether. For weeks he did not see Mrs. Maitland; she had written twice, first the conventional note of condolence and a reproachful inquiry as to his continued absence from Clovermead. Still he made no sign. Then she called on Trixie and met him face to face in the drawing room. He was calmly polite, and congratulated his better self when, upon greetings being exchanged, her warm ungloved hand aroused no lingering trace of passion. His pulses beat as evenly as before they met. Being a woman of quick intuition, she recognized that her power was spent and he had passed out of her keeping. And so the affair ended with a formal call now and then at Clovermead.

Since then, Bertram, to please his grandfather, had taken up the study of law, but the dry-as-dust work this entailed, chafed him. Office work was never to his taste, and an outdoor life was what he longed for. The trip to the Riviera, after many sedate months, was wine to his thirsty soul; to be with Trixie, able to tramp and boat and drive and sketch, master of his own time, with an indulgent Aunt Ethel who never expected any one to be punctual at

meals, was unqualified bliss. His sister, too, pleased with fresh scenes, lost the sad look which was hardening her handsome face, since their bereavement the spring before. Until Lady Beatrice joined them, serenity had ushered in their mornings and lullabyed their nights. Her arrival was slightly volcanic in its nature. For a day or two she was simply jolly, criticising their fellow guests and allowing herself to be drawn into many chats with the *coterie*, to its members intense edification. Then, lifting dainty skirts, she showed for a brief space the cloven hoof—by ordering some cigars and cigarettes sent to her rooms and receiving more than one caller of the opposite sex. The second offense against the cliques' good opinion was making the acquaintance of a young lady who had run the gamut of feminine criticism, and appeared with two young brothers, a youthful, decidedly attractive governess, a French maid and courier. The newcomer was an American.

"You could tell that by her self-possession in entering the drawing room," exclaimed Mrs. Medkins in a tone implying that self-consciousness was preferable.

Lady Ethel had been attracted by the girl's face and manner, but it was Lady Beatrice who

struck the keynote and landed into a harmonious acquaintanceship, which proved most acceptable to the entire party. Details gathered about the young American created fresh interest. Her father, a banker, detained at home on business, would join them in a few months; her mother was broken down nervously and the doctors had insisted that she be left to the care of her sister and a trained nurse, while the rest of the family removed to some place within easy call, but not near enough to permit the noisy boys rushing into the invalid's room. Finding that the governess was unable to control her unruly pupils, Isabel Saunders had been obliged to go with her little brothers and had the care of them and their governess also, who was a dependent, bric-a-brac sort of girl, utterly defying all cut-and-dried ideas as to an ordinary Englishwoman's estimate of underpaid and often overworked governesses. The Laymans shortly discovered that Isabel had met many of their London friends, and that she had letters of introduction to others. She had been presented at the first drawing room of the season, and would have remained to accept some delectable invitations, but her mother's health urged them south.

"I knew she was the right sort. She looked

so well groomed;" remarked Lady Beatrice triumphantly to her nieces, "and the *coterie's* back will have to come down when they see how intimate she is with the 'Ducal party.' Yes, that is what those idiots dub us. 'Who is she?' queries Mrs. Grundy, or 'what is she?' and above all 'what is she worth?' 'An American, an heiress, some million of dollars.' Presto! change. It is all correct. Baa, baa, bleats a society sheep, and a thousand tails wink after him. Over they go, head over heels sometimes in their desperate haste, lest they be distanced by the leaders in general opinion."

The girls laughed and vowed they had fallen in love with the American, on her own personal value, and intended to have her to tea in their rooms that afternoon, and Bertram must try to keep the two brothers in order, for, of course, they and their young teacher would be included in the invitation.

"There again the fair Isabel touched the British matron in a sore spot; governesses with us are commonly relegated to nurseries, and a pretty one is usually shown the door."

"I am sure Fraulein Schneider had a fair chance with us," remonstrated Trixie.

"If only Mrs. Medkin could drop in and see a salaried teacher being waited upon by a

duke's grandson," continued Lady Beatrice, "I think burned feathers and lavender salts would surely be in demand. How on earth does she expect to marry off those lanky daughters, if she does not powder their angles with a little *diablerie*?"

"I think the elder is quite pretty, and she is clever; does water-colors and spins at a real wheel."

Gertrude generally found a kind word for her sex.

"Bah! it is merely for the sake of the novelty that attics and lumber rooms have been ransacked and farmhouses invaded to unearth spinning wheels, so that girls may tie back flax with bright bows, hang up gourds quaintly to hold a drop of water wherewith to moisten taper finger-tips, and strike graceful poses, with their dainty feet beating time to the whirr and whirl of the ancient wheel, singing the same refrain it hummed in days of yore. Bertram! instead of sitting there, grinning at your elderly aunt, you had better be tuning my graceful little speech into a madrigal or sonnet; it really sounded quite poetical."

"And let it be read to the assembled Medkin crowd?"

"Bad boy! it would be wasting much sweet-

ness on desert air. No, if they want variety, I might preach to them upon the usefulness for matrimonial ends of cultivating novelties in fads—even to the extent of lauding the sentiment of the green carnation.”

XII.

It was Isabel Saunders who first suggested having lunch in one of the grottoes scattered along the coast between Mentone and Ventimiglia, and her brothers immediately insisted on carrying out the idea. Two sailboats were hired, and with well-packed baskets of eatables, and some rugs and books, Lady Ethel's party and the Saunders started off one glorious morning. There was just enough breeze to fill the sails as they scudded over the sparkling sea. Looking over the edge of the boats the blue depths were suggestive of mermaids and olden legends, while toward the shore was a new view of Mentone, showing the quaint church spires silhouetted against an azure sky, and terraces rising behind the town, where the lemon trees slowly melted into the olive groves above, and far beyond, the background of the noble Alps. Reaching the grotto, a hilarious lunch was enjoyed. Miss Saunders, who was hostess for the day, had invited the young chaplain of the English church to join the party.

Mr. Mordaunt had been especially kind to the boys, and evidently relished the afternoon cup of tea to which he was frequently invited by their elder sister and her bright-eyed companion, Susie Hubbard.

Lady Beatrice, feeling as she expressed it "very fit," desired strongly to hold forth, and meeting with no encouragement from her sister or nieces, enticed Isabel into an animated discussion concerning the respective merits of England and America. Some years before, Lady Beatrice had spent a few months on the other side of the Atlantic. She had seen and enjoyed much, and accepted unending entertainments from her hospitable hosts. She liked the United States and its people, but as usual, could not refrain from commenting upon her neighbors.

"It is all very well to uphold the integrity of your countrymen, but they are not taught honesty as we are; as a nation you practically condone much fraud. Of course, your eagle will stretch his wings and screech 'no,' but it is true, nevertheless, that there lurks a latent satisfaction in the hearts of your business men at hearing of a sharp bargain driven, and a desire to get the better of his neighbor is inborn in the Yankee."

"It seems born in John Bull," observed Bertram, lazily lying on a rug at the entrance to the grotto, and blowing smoke from a cigarette as he watched Isabel's profile, and decided that in a different style she was quite as handsome as Trixie.

"I deny it," retorted her ladyship, "though we have been dubbed a nation of shopkeepers;" and, she added parenthetically, "some of our blue blood is certainly running hotels, and sub rosa, owning pubs and florist and milinery shops."

"And don't forget the hansom cabs," put in Trixie.

"Aside from that," continued her aunt, not deigning to notice the interruption, "the average Britisher is certainly taught from the nursery that his word is his bond and that a lie is a mean thing. During a visit to your delightful States, I could not help being surprised at the pleasure children of good parentage took in 'stuffing,' as they called it, when one was foolish enough to listen to them seriously. With a straight face young America will tell you the most abominable lie, and think it a good joke if, being truthfully inclined, you believe them. Parents deem this 'cunning' and 'smart.' "

"Children are often a reproach to their parents," said Isabel, "but the license they are allowed, often with evil results, seems but a natural reaction from colonial days, when discipline among conservative Englishmen was so strict that children were not allowed to sit down in the presence of their parents."

"Of course, I must admit that we have spoilt children at home; I know the duke tried to spoil us, but then Ethel was not 'spoilable.' Still even our *enfants gâtés* kick in a less aggressive manner than yours, and scream in a lower tone. I wonder why it is that the keynote of your society register is pitched so much higher than ours? Arriving at an afternoon 'At Home' in New York, when the rooms are filled with well-dressed, pretty women, one is greeted at the door by a babel of shrill voices sufficient to give one an earache for a month."

Isabel laughed. The homethrust was only too accurate. Bertram, still watching her, began to softly hum "*Riez, riez toujours.*"

"As a nation, you love noise," asserted Lady Beatrice. "Even your engines and steamers screech with evident glee. Except among a small set, who out-English the English in repressing anything like demonstration, society in your wonderful States—for I admit that they

are wonderful—loves a crowd, loves to scream and loves to gabble. Look at your summer resorts; we have nothing in England compared to them; but your magnificent hotels are only backgrounds for the shoddy display of noisy idlers, who overflow the piazzas and offices, where rocking chairs vie with gossiping tongues in trying to solve the problem of perpetual motion.”

“Some English tongues seem to have mastered that problem already.”

The girls laughed, while Lady Beatrice frowned at her nephew’s audacity.

“I am afraid our second-class hordes are decidedly noisy, but second-class hordes invade even the sacred precincts of the Old World,” and there was a mischievous twinkle in Isabel’s eyes that delighted Bertram.

“Oh! I mean nothing personal touching your friends, for the people I met in New York, Boston, Philadelphia and elsewhere, were above criticism, and as to yourself, my dear, as a matter of plain history, I should never have taken you for an American.”

“Which is the highest praise most of the English think can be bestowed upon us,” and again the gray eyes were dancing with merriment.

"Just think, Aunt Beatrice, if a Yankee turned the table and implied a compliment by declaring he would never have taken you for an Englishwoman."

Gertrude, who could never bring herself to fence with any one, pinched Trixie gently to express approval of her cousin's daring. Lady Beatrice's lorgnette was levelled at the speaker with the remark:

"I should much prefer being taken for a French woman."

"By the way, I met a most fascinating French widow yesterday at the Countess Something-whisky's tea (I never can remember those long Russian names)—such a beautiful woman—I don't mean my hostess, but the widow."

A smile rippled around at Isabel's proscript. They had all noted the countess, who was reputed as witty as she was ugly. "*Elle était laide à faire peur*," asserted her enemies, yet her invitations were accepted with avidity. The Medkins had been surprised to find that she had called on the American girl, whom they tried to snub; but the countess was wise in her generation. Her bankers had said enough to prove that Isabel would be an attraction.

Lady Ethel's gentle voice was heard asking who was this beautiful widow.

"A Madame Millefleurs who lives in an ideal villa, is fabulously rich, possesses a fairy princess sort of daughter——"

"Tell us about her; fairy princesses are rare nowadays."

"She is different from most girls, with dreamy violet eyes, pale golden curls crowning a delicate little head, exquisite coloring and a pensive mouth, though her smile is bewitching. She speaks English with a faint accent, but her mother has only a delicious enunciation. They liked a song I sang, were very friendly, and are coming to see me. I have lost my heart to both."

"Such a ridiculous name," observed Trixie.

"The girl is called Etoile, and happy will the man be upon whom her light shines."

"Whose light shines?" asked Mr. Mordaunt, returning from an inspection of the inner grotto, whither he had accompanied Susie Hubbard and the Saunders boys.

"Etoile Millefleurs'."

"Is she not lovely? I am glad you have met her. They do not know many of the English here, but frequent the French and Russian colony."

"They are French, of course?"

"Madame Millefleurs had an English mother and was educated in England; her father was French. Her husband died some five years ago, quite an old man. His people are devoted to her. She is charity itself, her kindness embracing all creeds and nationalities. Mentone owes her much."

There was a whoop from the boys, who burst into view, followed by their governess. "Oh, Bella!" they shrieked, "we have found some remains—look! Mr. Mordaunt, just as you left, we found them."

The gray, brownish-looking objects were handled with curiosity by the group, when the young clergyman pronounced them, to the best of his belief, to be genuine relics of the stone age.

"A quantity of human bones, weapons and tools have been found in these caves, between here and Nice; we must show these to old Mr. Tusseau, who is an expert."

"We'll start a museum of our own and put in our own curiosities only," exclaimed Billy.

"And get papa to give us the cases," added Robbie.

Lady Beatrice, who was not partial to children, rose and, shaking her jaunty dress, de-

clared they would all die of cramp if they sat still any longer, and proposed continuing the sail. The two sunburned Italians who had charge of the crafts, were ordered to get them ready, and the young fellows scrambled up from an unfinished nap and began transferring the cushions and rugs from the cave to the "Maria" and "Carina." Bertram while lending a hand, heard a shout. Another boat was approaching; a moment more and she grated on the beach, while two familiar figures sprang out.

"Ye gods and little fishes! What good wind wafts you here?"

Bertram was giving a strong grip to Harold Jewett and Paul Herbert. The explanation was simple: Sir Julian Drayton had a patient who offered unlimited sums to have the famous physician accompany him to the Riviera, but as he found it impossible to leave his London practice, Harold had been substituted to attend the sick man for a month and daily telegraph his progress to Sir Julian, who was to prescribe by return telegrams. Paul Herbert, being run down from a hard winter's work, had decided to join Harold for a short vacation. The two had hunted up their friends and, finding that they were out sailing, decided not to lose such

XIII.

COMTE JULES DE VILLENEUF brought letters of introduction to Madame Millefleurs, and forthwith was invited to dine *en famille*. His credentials came from old friends of madame's husband, which was quite enough to insure him a welcome. During her husband's lifetime and since his death, Madame Millefleurs had tried by anticipating his every wish while living, and honoring his memory when dead, to atone in a measure for her inability to return the devotion he had lavished upon her. She had never deceived the old merchant, who knew that respect and gratitude, and tender solicitude for his welfare, was all he could expect in return from the woman he adored.

Comte Jules was a very practical man, who had managed to retain his small estate in Brittany, which, through the extravagance of his father, had barely escaped falling into the hands of strangers. While his income was small, he succeeded through prudence and

economy in enjoying life, and as a compensation for limited means, he boasted the bluest blood in all France. He was direct heir to an old childless marquis, whose suggestions generally had to be construed as commands. So, when the autocratic old marquis had said to him one day, "Jules, *mon ami*, it is time that you had a *menage* of your own, and a son to bear your name," the comte felt it was his bounden duty to marry on the first available occasion, and, when a few months later, the marquis grumbled at his still being a bachelor, the comte had asked for a list of eligible maidens.

"In my day," growled the old nobleman, "we had no difficulty in making out our own lists of the mademoiselles we admired, the only trouble being that too often our choice did not meet the parental approval; but nowadays, when young men are extremely independent of their elders' advice, they seem too indolent to take the trouble of even making a selection among the fair ones around them."

But before the count took his departure, his relative had run over the names of several of his friends, recalling their daughters or granddaughters to little purpose, for none suited his taste. Suddenly he exclaimed:

"Why, there's Millefleurs' little girl; let me see, she must be grown by this time. Now, if you could win her, *mon cher*, she would bring you a large dot, and you would have the pleasure of being son-in-law to one of the most charming women I have ever known."

It was on the loggia, after dinner, when they were sipping coffee, and Etoile had vanished for a moment that Comte de Villeneuve communicated the object of his visit to Madame Millefleurs, who seemed considerably startled by his proposition.

"My daughter is very young," she began.

"Is not Mademoiselle Etoile twenty?"

"Yes, but she is young for her age, and to me seems such an utter child yet that I could not associate her with the idea of marriage at present."

"If madame would only allow me to pay my court to mademoiselle, I should be willing, of course, to wait six months or a year, should I be so fortunate as to gain mademoiselle's affection."

"I do not think it likely," said Madame Millefleurs hesitatingly, "that Etoile will be anxious to leave her home. I fully appreciate, Monsieur le Comte, the honor you are doing me in asking for the hand of my daughter, but

being partly English myself, I have ideas on this subject somewhat at variance with those current in France. You will find yourself a welcome visitor at our villa and so have opportunities of seeing more of my daughter and deciding whether she and you can really care for each other."

"From what I have already heard of Mademoiselle Etoile, I feel sure that the man would be extremely enviable who could win her for his wife, and now that I have seen her, I am more anxious than ever that I should be that happy individual."

Etolie, joining her mother at this moment, put an end to the conversation, but the count, taking Madame Millefleurs at her word, became a constant visitor at the villa. It was just at this time that Isabel Saunders met the charming widow. Mutually they were attracted to each other, and invitations to Villa Millefleurs followed. The count being very much in evidence there, Isabel wondered whom he was courting—mother or daughter; he divided his compliments and attentions between them equally.

"How do you like him?" asked Etoile of their new friend.

"As French counts go, he is not objection-

able," was the blunt reply. "I am not partial to the foreign nobility, as a rule—at least not to the masculine part of it."

"But he cannot help being born noble, and he seems kind and polite. *Maman* likes him," urged Etoile, as a conclusive reason for approving of him herself.

The two girls were sitting in an arbor covered with vines; a small table littered with pencils, a box of colors and drawing pads showed their morning's work. A beautiful peep of Mentone and the Mediterranean below had invited the rough sketches. Isabel glanced at the innocent face beside her with its violet eyes gazing out into life so dreamily, and secretly hoped that Etoile, with her ideals and illusions and sweet white soul, would never mate with a man of the world like Jules de Villeneuve. Her cogitations were abruptly terminated by a servant bringing a message for mademoiselle to join madame immediately. There had been a slight accident.

"An accident—to whom? What do you mean?" cried the young girl, pale in an instant.

It was the nursery governess who had been thrown down by a horse. She was better; mademoiselle must not agitate herself.

"What! Nera, dearest Nera," and without

waiting to hear more, Etoile had flown toward the house.

As Isabel followed with the maid more slowly, she gathered that, in crossing a street, while shopping in Mentone, "Nera," as the woman was familiarly called, had been knocked down by a reckless driver, and would have been killed but for the courage of a gentleman, who, at great risk, rushed forward and dragged her from beneath the horses' feet, and the stranger then carried her into a shop, and procured a physician who bound up some ugly cuts, and to complete his kindness, her deliverer called a carriage and drove her home. Evidently he would then have made his escape, but Madame Millefleurs had insisted upon his remaining until Etoile could be summoned to join her thanks to her mother's, for the stranger's goodness.

Nera had been lifted from the carriage and taken to her room, and madame and mademoiselle were listening to the doctor's directions which the gentleman was transmitting to them, when Isabel, coming down the cypress drive to the portico of the villa, recognized Bertram.

"Why, Mr. Sinclair!" she exclaimed.

At her voice Madame Millefleurs started violently. Bertram turned in surprise.

"This is delightful; I had not expected to see you this morning," and a look of mutual satisfaction was signalled from their eyes.

"Let me properly introduce my friend," began Isabel.

"There is no need; I know now to whom we are indebted. I believe you are staying with your aunt, Lady Ethel Layman and your sister and cousin at the Hotel des Anglais?" Madame's beautiful dark eyes were on his face; her voice was vibrating with repressed emotion.

"How she cares for that woman," thought the young American. "I do hope that the accident may lead to no serious results, for my friends, with their ardent southern nature, would suffer much in losing their trusty companion."

Bertram acknowledged that his party was staying at the hotel.

"You see, Dame Rumor has already spoken of you; her whispers stretch even to our olive-covered hills. You are most welcome, Mr. Sinclair, to Villa Millefleurs. My daughter and I shall never forget your bravery. I beg, as it is already noon, you will lunch with us."

If Isabel had not stood there with the sunlight flickering on her reddish bronze hair and her eager eyes filled with light, Bertram would

have declined the invitation, but her presence always attracted him so strongly that the temptation to spend a few hours in her company among such pleasant surroundings, was irresistible, and he accepted Madame Millefleurs' hospitality with unfeigned pleasure.

"We lunch at one, and perhaps while we are with our poor Nera Miss Saunders will kindly play hostess for me and show you some of our pet views."

Isabel gladly acquiesced and soon was wandering through a small grove of evergreen oaks, palms, and cypresses. On the outskirts of the wood was a garden, laid out in terraces, scenting the air with its burden of roses, heliotrope, mignonette, jessamine, geranium and a hundred different flowers, while around like sentries guarding this little world of fragrance, stood rows of orange and lemon trees, decked in bridal array of white blossoms. In the center was a huge stone fountain, surmounted by an amiable triton, blowing watery blasts from his great conch shell, while goldfish sported beneath the silvery rain falling into the basin below. Stone and marble seats were scattered around the garden and upon one of these, under an old cypress, Isabel sat listening to Bertram's account of the accident.

"Indirectly, I feel a bit responsible for the poor soul's fall; she had been watching me buy some pottery and was listening with both ears when I gave my name and address, her black eyes staring incessantly at me until I hardly knew whether to be flattered or annoyed by this persistent surveillance. The woman looked so respectable with her white hair and neat dress that I could not suspect her of designs on my pocket, and curious to see if she would follow me, I walked down to the next street and crossed over the road. 'Nera,' as they call her, was close on my footsteps, evidently fearing to lose sight of me. She was looking at my retreating figure and not watching the carriages which were driving past her; hence the catastrophe. I caught a glimpse of the poor thing being flung to the ground, and naturally endeavored to drag her from under those merciless hoofs."

"So feminine curiosity brought a penalty of sprained arm, cut head and bruises *ad infinitum*. I did not realize you were so worth looking at."

But he did not mind Isabel's chaffing while her smile shone on him and her clear laugh conveyed a feeling of *bon camaraderie*. "Pessimism does not suit you, especially when it

touches the subject of women; you are too chivalrous."

By way of thanks, Bertram broke two roses from an outstretched branch and gave them to her in silence. She pinned them to her belt, while a swift, rare blush touched her cheeks and then became deeper as she marvelled that she blushed. A sudden spell fell upon the two; the garden became enchanted, the dripping water fairy music, the past with sad memories banished, while the overwhelming present was theirs, with its golden moments; the odors of flowers were intoxicating fumes to their brains. Suddenly Bertram awoke to the fact that he was wildly happy, that a new life had dawned for him, where the hopes and fears of his *ego* were dimmed by the great light sweeping over him from another soul. It was not the delectation of flirtation, the mere sensuous enjoyment of nearness to a lovely woman, nor the mad excitement of passion with its fiery longings and selfish desires; it was a sweet calm peace that stole through his whole being, calling for the surrender of self and filling his heart with holy raptures. Isabel read unspoken thoughts in his brown eyes; her pulses beat with pleasure, for she had begun to realize what this daily informal companionship with Bertram

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meant to her, but she would not take advantage of the passing spell to encourage avowals which in soberer hours might be regretted. With an effort she asked in most prosaic tones, "What was Nera's other name?"

With a start, Bertram roused himself to answer that he had not the slightest idea. He tried to listen to the remarks that followed, but conversation languished, for he felt it almost beyond his power to talk commonplaces while wonderful harmonies were singing in his soul—still too faintly to pour forth in words, but loud enough to deafen mere worldly din. It was almost a relief when Etoile's white dress gleamed among the shadows of the cypress trees, and her soft voice summoned them to lunch.

"Have you seen all the views, monsieur?" she asked.

"I left some of the favorites for you to show to Mr. Sinclair."

"Is it not lovely here?" said Etoile to Bertram, with innocent pride. "I love this home so much that it seems to me the most charming spot on earth."

"It is very beautiful, indeed; a place to live out noble thoughts; a place to realize ideals," said Bertram dreamily, as he gazed toward the distant Alps and the blue sea stretching out to the horizon.

Etoile flashed a bright glance at him: "Ah! I know now that you belong to my world; I hope you will come to the villa very often with my *cara* Miss Isabel."

Bertram did not understand the little speech. Later he knew. Etoile classed all the people she met as outside or inside her world, as she called it, meaning a sphere of thought where all men and women who believed in goodness or ideality met on common ground. Within its sacred limits only brotherly love prevailed; envy, hatred, and all uncharitableness were banished from Etoile's happy country.

As they neared the house, Comte Jules de Villeneuve met them coming down the broad drive, and the two men were introduced.

"So, I may have a rival," thought the count, watching the young girl he proposed to marry, and noting her animated face raised to Bertram. The latter wondered whether this aristocratic-looking Frenchman, with his St. Germain manner, had favorably impressed Isabel, but a remembrance of her responsive, blushing face, as she pinned on the roses, equalized the dawning fear. That the count ardently admired her, he had no doubt.

The dining room opened out upon a *loggia* overlooking the valley and Mentone below.

Where Bertram sat he could see the sparkle of the sea between the trees and hear the birds singing without and within from a small aviary in the conservatory adjoining. The scent of flowers filled the rooms, roses in silver dishes mingling with the delicate cut glass and Dresden china. The gracious hostess presided over a delectable luncheon prepared by her French chef, and the admirably trained servants aided in producing a sense of well-being and comfort which her guests fully appreciated. No wonder Isabel had been absorbed in these new friend. This was enchanted ground, where two harmless Circes wove their mystic spell about all who were favored enough to enter their domains. After luncheon, Etoile took Bertram for a short walk to some crags that commanded a wide view of the country and hills beyond. The count followed at a short distance with Isabel and seemed purposely to linger behind. Bertram's eyes turned toward the loiterers. His young guide laughed:

"No wonder you admire her; she is so original and so good, without pretense and is besides so handsome. Every one must like her."

"She is certainly most attractive," he answered, rather confused at her frankness.

"Attractive is not the word, and you do not

mean that; now you are slipping out of my world; unless you say just what you think you will be without the gates."

"Having once let me within, it would be too cruel to exclude me again."

Etoile leaned a little toward her companion and said, earnestly: "You are brave, because you risked yourself to save our Nera, whom we love—and brave men are true, so I can speak openly. I quite love Isabel, and, when I know you better, shall love you, too. If you love each other, why be afraid to own it; love is so beautiful; there is nothing like it in the whole wide world. You look surprised, but a little later you will learn to understand me. I am not like other girls. There are some things one must know about oneself; a great beauty realizes her charm; great painters and authors, however modest, recognize their own God-given talent. Where others have experience, I have intuitions which tell me the truth about people. If I ceased to be perfectly open myself or nursed envy or hatred, instead of admiration and love for others, in my heart, these intuitions would vanish and I should have to learn by experience as worldly people do. You will come here often, we shall become great friends, and you will find I can be trusted, and you will

talk to me as to a little sister. If Isabel does not yet feel willing to acknowledge that she loves you, then you must wait to tell her what is in your heart."

The young girl paused and looked confidently up into Bertram's face.

"You are silent because you do not know quite how to answer me. Say nothing now; I understand all you feel."

And so looking down at Isabel coming slowly toward them, the Rubicon was passed and Bertram, no longer disguising his feelings, whispered to Etoile:

"Yes. I love her; and shall through all eternity."

XIV.

WHEN people are wandering about in a paradise of their own creating, fools are apt to rush in where angels fear to tread. Both Isabel and Bertram were dreaming, hoping, fearing, wholly unconscious that kind and unkind eyes were watching their little comedy, and that Mrs. Medkins and her *coterie*, and every Tom Noddy gossip were passing comments and weighing probabilities as to their becoming engaged.

Lady Ethel, Trixie and Gertrude heartily approved of Isabel and welcomed the thought of her becoming one of the family. They discreetly avoided any illusion to the subject before Bertram, but devising a hundred opportunities for the young people to meet, wisely ignored their openly shown preference for each other's society. Notwithstanding Bertram's avowal to Etoile, he ventured on none to Isabel, fearing to stake his happiness on her answer until she had given him more definite encouragement. In his own mind he revolved

the question as to choosing a favorable moment to have his fate decided. A sail some sunny morning, when, with only the boys fishing and an old boatman for company, golden moments of semisolitude could be secured, with the azure Mediterranean and majestic Alps to nerve him to voice the right words; or, a moonlight stroll by the sea wall when the soft night breeze, perfume laden, and the silvery light on the waters, opened hearts to speak and listen; again, he might make up a donkey party to a high point and with the boys still as unconscious conspirators, beguile Isabel away from the rest of the party, and on some lofty crag, amid enchanting scenery, pour out his soul in her ear. But the Fates smiled not on these plans; they willed it otherwise. After breakfast one day Trixie proposed a drive to Monte Carlo, and sent Bertram to beg Isabel to join them. She was in her sitting room by the open window when he was announced. Before he could deliver his message, she exclaimed:

"Such a ludicrous thing has happened, and though I am pleased, I hardly know yet whether to laugh or cry; it is as if some one had jogged my mental funny bone."

She was flushed and looked very handsome and excited.

"Tell me about it," he urged, seating himself near the sofa, as she sank back among the cushions and laughed and sighed in a breath. "It was so unexpected. I had told Susie I would take the boys a walk, so she could get off some home letters this morning, but we had barely left the hotel when my brothers changed their minds and begged for a sail with old Tomasso, who seems a trusty soul. I started them off and returned. Opening this door, I observed Mr. Mordaunt in the act of embracing Susie! Oh, you need not look shocked; it's all right. A moment's confusion ensued. I involuntarily exclaimed, 'I beg your pardon!' and was beating a hasty retreat, when Susie rushed into my arms and confided that she had just become engaged to the worthy chaplain. Of course, poor things, they were not expecting me to return so soon—and any one else would have knocked!"

Bertram laughed outright at the picture conjured up of shy Mr. Mordaunt's horror at being caught love making.

"And when will the wedding take place?"

"It is rather early to settle dates, but when mamma and my aunt join me, which I hope will be next week, we shall arrange so that Susie can have a nice send-off. There is no

need for them to wait. Their small incomes united will suffice for the love in a cottage they anticipate——”

“Do you laugh at that, too?”

“Certainly not; as somebody says somewhere, ‘give me a true heart and a potato paring.’”

“Will you take the true heart without the potato paring?”

Isabel started, and the smile died on her lips. Fears that she might imagine he was merely jesting, precipitated matters.

“Isabel—do you not know that I love you—that my greatest happiness in life would be to win you for my own?”

She turned her head away in silence. Bertram, reckless now that all was gained or lost, threw himself on the sofa beside her, and taking one of the slim hands in his, tried to look into her face.

“Isabel, speak to me—oh, surely such love as mine must earn some response?”

She slowly turned toward him, and tears were in her eyes. Though not a word more was spoken, Bertram sealed her answer with his lips.

No one was more pleased when the engagement was announced than Harold Jewett, and he talked it over freely with Trixie, who was

glad of the chance for a *tête-à-tête* with her old playfellow. She had seen little of him alone since his arrival at Mentone. The three men were often together, discussing clubs, college days, religion, or politics, or whatever else engaged their masculine minds at the moment. When with the ladies, Bertram invariably singled out Isabel, Paul Herbert talked to Trixie and Lady Ethel, which naturally left Harold to Gertrude. The young girl, unused to much attention, enjoyed having a handsome young fellow spending most of his time on her. Timidly she would raise the blue orbs, pale reflections of his own, and a gentle animation drew her from her habitual shell. Harold's kind heart liked to amuse this quiet maiden, who seemed ever ready to put others before herself. Lady Ethel did not shut her eyes to the risk she ran of throwing them together, but the thought of her other daughters at home weighed with her. Money and position did not mean all in all to her, and Gertrude besides had not the dash or good looks of the younger sisters. Having her eldest girl married to a man she loved and thus knowing her happiness secured, would compensate for resigning hopes of a more ambitious match. Trixie had astutely surmised her aunt's wishes. A little pang of

pricked her (remembering how she had deemed Harold out of the question for a duke's granddaughter, and now her cousin, without the bar sinister, would gladly accept him for a husband). To show her indifference, she exerted herself in being especially charming to Paul Herbert, who had always admired his friend's sister. Out of harness, he appeared in a new light, full of life and gayety, witty, and spontaneous, and altogether a delightful companion. That others appreciated the young clergyman was soon apparent. A bishop of his acquaintance, spending a few days at Mentone, had him to dinner; the Russian countess swooped him off to her teas.

"He is such an original," she would say, "a bric-a-brac philanthropist without cant, and a born reformer and enthusiast."

It soothed Trixie's ruffled spirits to know that this highly cultivated and singularly pure-hearted man, should relish her society and seek her smiles. She felt that here she scored a point against the fate that had so cruelly thrust her forth into the world without a father's name or blessing. When her brother's engagement brought Harold to her side for an hour or two of confidential talk, she enjoyed the overture on his part all the more from the knowl-

edge that he was sure his ideal friend was apparently at her feet. The tale of Bertram's wooing sped. To verify it, Lady Beatrice rode over from Nice on a bicycle, electrifying the staid matrons at the hotel by appearing in natty bloomers and a rakish cap on her head. Her sister remonstrated.

"Do you want to see me dragged to the ground by my skirts. It is for safety that I wear these much maligned garments."

"But surely a short skirt——"

"Nonsense; knickerbockers are the correct thing for a wheel, and I am nothing if not correct."

She approved of Bertram's choice, and was unusually gracious to her nephew in consequence. *En famille* she observed that she liked Yankees, notwithstanding that America was *l'enfant terrible* of the Old World, which holds its breath in expectation of what this grown child will do next, and believing it capable of any extravagance.

"We depreciate, yet admire, these go-ahead people, and not only gladly marry their daughters, but let them knock over family traditions like so many ninepins, for the laws of the Medes and Persians do not exist for a full-fledged American girl. If it pleases her,

she lifts dainty skirts and, showing daintier ankles, trips lightly across every cut-and-dried rule laid down by Mrs. Grundy. If thrones were within reach, this clever maiden, with the utmost *sang-froid*, would mount to the royal seat, but the man is still unborn who will ever see her abdicate one."

And no one ventured to gainsay Lady Beatrice's dictum. They were lunching in the Layman's rooms, as Lady Ethel flatly refused to appear in public beside what she termed a most objectionable costume.

"What cant public opinion preaches!" exclaimed the emancipated sister. "We gloat over our scant bathing suits at English and foreign seaside resorts where the limbs and forms of apparently modest young girls, and fat matrons are liberally displayed to the vulgar gaze of thousands, and 'nary' a grunt from Mrs. Grundy; but woe to the young woman who dons a short skirt to preclude the possibility of transporting home microbes from street filth or catching pneumonia from damp dresses dripping against her ankles. When astride a wheel, knickerbockers and gaiters, I repeat, are the only sensible things to wear, and it is only a question of time when all women will use them."

"Heaven forbid!" ejaculated Lady Ethel.

"And after all," concludes Lady Beatrice, confidentially, "where's the harm in a pair of well built legs?"

Perhaps if she had been blessed with spindle shanks she would not have taken so kindly to the offending raiment.

On account of his aunt's visit, Bertram deferred a drive with the Millefleurs. Isabel had sent a little note to Etoile, telling her of the engagement and promising to appear later in the day with her *fiancé*. Madame Millefleurs heard the news with deep interest.

"Why do tears come into your dear eyes, sweet *maman*?" pleaded Etoile. "Are you not glad that these two friends are to be together and happy?"

"I am very, very glad, my darling;" but the wherefore of the tears was not explained.

Not knowing whether the engagement was yet publicly announced, they refrained from mentioning it to Comte Jules de Villeneuve when he arrived to pay his daily compliments to the ladies. He noted with dismay the joyful expression on Etoile's face when, looking at the clock, she observed that Bertram would soon arrive. The count's jealous anxiety had daily increased with the young Englishman's

visits. It was impossible not to see that madame and mademoiselle received him with open arms. This stirred the count to more demonstrations; he had found Etoile no French bread-and-butter miss, though transparently pure and innocent. She had been brought up more like an English girl and possessed no false modesty to induce bashful poses of an *ingénue*. Secretly her suitor doubted if he valued her frankness. It embarrassed him; he could not meet her with barefaced statements, which, as a man of the world, he could exchange with a grown woman of his own set; nor could he pretend to this outspoken maiden that he judged her an ignorant baby who as yet knew naught of the world beyond the jingle of its rattle. Etoile had met his advances as signs of a pleasant friendship, and the count might have felt encouraged but for Bertram forever looming up, a veritable Gibraltar upon the matrimonial sea he longed to sail. Etoile's suppressed excitement roused the count to the nearness of his imagined danger. He was glad when, after lunch, Madame Millefleurs left him a few moments alone with her daughter. He glanced at the winsome face, absorbed for the moment in watching a kitten playing with a spool, and then, with a lingering regret for the proposed abdication of bachelorhood, gravely said:

"If mademoiselle would favor me with half the attention she bestows upon her pet, I should feel much flattered."

"You may have all my attention," she replied, dropping the string attached to the spool, which rolled away, as the kitten frisked after it.

"Your charming mother has granted me the great privilege of becoming well acquainted with you, and I trust that we already are friends?"

"Yes," said Etoile, a little doubtfully, "I suppose we are what you would term 'friends'."

"I am now going to ask you if I may attain to a still nearer title?"

The young girl looked slightly puzzled, and the count vehemently wished she would not preserve such an indifferent air. It disconcerted him considerably and cooled the sentiment he tried to evoke from the ashes of dead passions in his heart. Fearing to lose this opportunity of being alone with her, he stumbled on:

"Mademoiselle, your gracious mother has met me so kindly. I am hoping you might accede to my wishes—that we might learn to be much to each other; in fact, that you might honor me sufficiently to accept the humble offer of my name, my hand, and my heart."

The violet eyes opened wide, the rosy lips parted, and to the count's unfeigned disgust, the young girl laughed.

"Forgive me, M. le Comte; I am rude; you must be in earnest, and yet it seems very funny to me—that you should dream of this for an instant. I am too happy at home to wish to change my life here for any other; and then, do you not see how unsuited we would be to each other? You and I think different thoughts and must lead different lives."

"I thought you liked me, mademoiselle; you encouraged my intentions. I am shocked. I am——"

"It is only a little misunderstanding," interrupted Etoile. "I did try to please you and did accept your attentions for your own good."

The count's surprise at this admission was genuine.

"You seemed better than the ordinary society man one meets," continued Etoile, serenely, "and so I thought you worth helping. I believed that constant interchange of thoughts with a young girl who has high ideals, though she may often fail in living up to them, must be of use to you who are accustomed to the insincere jargon of society. If my little efforts have been thrown away, I am sorry."

"*Ciel!*" thought the count, "what creature is this, with the face of a saint, the calm assurance of a woman of the world, and the manners of a child in a fairy tale?"

"Do not be angry because I refuse an offer the acceptance of which would not bring you any happiness."

"That is for me to judge," he replied, quickly; and then, his suspicions returning, he added, "Perhaps some one else has forestalled me in your affections?"

"In my affections—yes; I have several old friends, but a lover—no."

"Not even one young English friend?"

The words would slip out, and a moment later the count regretted what his temper prompted.

"So that is what you have been thinking? How droll. I am very fond of M. Sinclair, also of beautiful Mlle. Isabel Saunders, his *fiancée*; they have been engaged since yesterday," and Etoile laughed gleefully at the count's blank face.

His dignity was much wounded. "You do not consider my disappointment, just as I was anticipating a life *bien range*, with a charming companion by my side."

"Put some one else there," suggested the

young girl, as Isabel and Bertram appeared with Madame Millefleurs. Felicitating the radiant couple, the count inwardly raged and hastened his departure as soon as his confused thoughts could submit a reasonable excuse. But, returning to his hotel, on due reflection, he experienced a sense of relief. He had done his duty and failed in his matrimonial efforts. Had he succeeded, the vision of being tied for life to a clear-eyed young Diana, who turned ordinary ideas topsy-turvy, did not seem the summit of happiness to his conventional mind. By the time he had dined and had his *chasse café*, he felt elated at his regained freedom, ready to forgive the "*petite*" who so mockingly refused him. He called for pen and paper and wrote to the old marquis, asking for future advice, and decided, while awaiting an answer, to devote himself to those diverting *Anglais* he had lately met through Isabel Saunders.

XV.

THE Duke of Beaulieu was not surprised to receive Bertram's letter, announcing his engagement and begging for his grandfather's approval.

Lady Ethel had piped the prelude to the pretty tale, in one of her chatty epistles. A kind response came to both young people; they must be married on their return to London, as the writer was getting old and should like to have a bonnie bride at Strathways to enliven the last days of a lonely life. He hoped to hear of Trixie following her brother's good example. Lady Ethel was delighted to find her father roused from the melancholy memories of the dear dead. She sent another long missive, expatiating on Isabel's good qualities of heart and mind. "She is a sweet, unaffected girl," she wrote, "and will make Bertram a splendid wife. They are heartily in love with each other in good old-fashioned style. Her mother and aunt have just arrived, both refined and charming, and absolutely gentlewomen. Ac-

cording to certain London lights, Isabel would be more of a success (that is, more decidedly American) if her mother was loud-toned and aggressive and her father a plebeian pork-packer, instead of a college bred man as well as a rich banker, or if she herself spoke with a nasal twang and said 'popper' and 'I guess,' or ignored fine table manners, which in these days of ready money and good clothes is often the only hallmark distinguishing between social sterling silver and Britannia metal."

The advent of Mrs. Saunders robbed Bertram somewhat of the daughter's society, but the mother pleaded that he would soon have her all to himself. During these short, enforced separations, the restless lover would wander up to Villa Millefleurs, sure of sympathy and welcome there. The dark-eyed hostess, soft voiced and singularly beautiful, reminded him of some dethroned queen casting mournful glances back upon her lost kingdom. There was a pathetic droop to the red lips which appealed to Bertram, and he felt a longing to offer her his services to right unknown wrongs, to defend her from unknown dangers. Hers seemed an ardent nature repressed and as guarded as Etoile's was open to light of day. The two, so closely entwined

in each other's existence, yet so dissimilar in manner and appearance, formed a constant picture in Bertram's thoughts, which he longed that Trixie could share; but though she conferred admiration, there was no willingness to cement a budding friendship.

Lady Layman's card, with her daughter's and Trixie's, mingled with less aristocratic bits of pasteboard, in the card receiver at the villa, and several visits had been exchanged. Bertram fancied that Madame Millefleurs was slightly ill at ease in his aunt's presence. It was as though some light which usually illumined her beautiful eyes was suddenly quenched; she seemed to shrink into herself with a vague nervousness. He had also noticed this manner once when Nera, recovered, came to offer him renewed thanks. The old housekeeper hesitated in her speech and her mistress was evidently relieved when the short interview was over. Though Bertram regretted that there should be no intimacy between Trixie and his new friends, his steps still turned to the Villa whenever a spare hour hung on his hands. Etoile's rare nature, combining childlike innocence with much mature thought, and her mother's fascination, so subtle he hardly knew how to define it, enhanced the natural beauties

of Villa Millefleurs, whether sitting on the *loggia* talking and listening to Madame or following Etoile's fleet steps through the grove and up steep paths to far-reaching views. Bertram felt the restful sense of being in complete sympathy with his surroundings. He spoke freely of Strathways, the late duchess, the duke, Oxford days, his future plans, Isabel, and his friends, Harold Jewett and Paul Herbert.

"Bring them here," said Madame Millefleurs one day. "I should like to meet these two men who are so much to you."

Bertram wondered whether the villa would mean enchanted ground to them, as it did to him. That particular afternoon they had gone with Lady Ethel, Trixie and Gertrude to Monte Carlo by train. Count Villeneuf was also of the party. He had been with them a great deal of late, and shown the ladies much attention. After going through the Casino and stopping a moment at the tables to watch the games and hear the eternal "*faites votre jeu, messieurs*," Paul Herbert had declared that even the concert could not reconcile his conscience to the general atmosphere of the place, and he greatly preferred the outside to the inside. A general protest arose.

"The music is so good, this afternoon," observed Lady Ethel, glancing at a programme.

"And I am going to play once for Miss Layman; it will be virgin luck," said Harold.

"You must not desert the ladies," remarked the count.

"I should like to walk about the gardens; the afternoon is so lovely it does seem wicked to be cooped indoors. Why can we not parade about, Mr. Herbert, till the others join us?"

And so Trixie sailed off with the young clergyman, while the count raised his eyebrows and marveled at this marked preference. He had been much impressed by "*cette belle Made-moiselle Sinclair*," and admired her sharp speeches, stately beauty and proud manner. Could it be possible that she would condescend to listen to the compliments of a *curé*? for Jules de Villeneuve could not weigh his neighbor's value, not seeing beyond the cloth. Out in the sunshine the prophesied compliments were not forthcoming. A sudden depressing silence seemed to possess Paul. He strolled on, listening to Trixie, whose spirits rose, aroused by the dread that her company was not needed. As they paused on the terrace overlooking Monaco, with the sea restlessly lashing its rocks, she quoted the old Monegasque saying:

"Son Monaco sopra un scoglio
Non semino e non raccoglio
E pur mangiar volio."

"And it will eat to the end of the chapter bodies and souls of luckless wights, who are lured on to their destruction by this Lorelei of the Riviera."

"Still, we cannot deny her charms, nor refrain from loving her."

"If we did not refrain from loving the sirens who charm us during life's short voyage, I believe a cairn of honest men's bones would whiten each Lorelei's rocky perch."

"You speak as if you had passed them by, Mr. Herbert."

"Perhaps."

"Would none tempt you to linger and listen to her music?"

"None, Miss Trixie."

"It was 'Trixie' when we first met," said the girl a little shyly.

"You were a child then."

"What does it matter after all? Are not men and women but children of a larger growth?"

"Some of them; not those of your type."

"Am I then so mature in the ways of the world?"

"You are no *ingénue*."

"Thank you."

"Have I been rude? Pardon me. I am not

a society man; one loses the art of putting things prettily when absorbed in work."

"All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy."

"I am dull, no doubt, and to you and others my life must seem meager and ænemic, but if you could see the heart of it, you would find it full blooded."

"You misjudge me, Mr. Herbert, if you think I do not appreciate your devotion to your poor people. Both Bertram and I fully appreciate your sacrifice."

Her colder tone jarred on him; he was in a mood to criticize himself as well as her. Lately the ground had been slipping from under his feet; he feared to drift lest he should find his will power unresponsive from lack of use when needed. Paul believed in holding himself well in check. If once the artistic side of his nature had free rein, there was no telling how far it might run away with all his resolutions. Trixie's beauty appealed to him; he was gratified that she should care for his admiration, but his common sense dictated a short sermon to his inmost *ego*, preaching restraint, lest he should commit himself to what would be a blunder for both. "We are absolutely unsuited to each other," he thought, "and besides I should like

Harold to have another chance." A pause had ensued.

"Let us change the subject," he suggested, "we are becoming too personal."

Surely a cold breath had come up out of the sea as he spoke; she shivered in the sunshine.

The words were nothing, but his eyes had lost their friendliness and the lines around his mouth grew stern. Just as she fancied her personality had influenced his iron will, and she was secretly rejoicing that Harold's idol should bow to her charms, he was slipping away from her altogether, and it stung her to realize how much she had valued his good opinion, how nearly ready she had been to listen if he had spoken of something warmer than friendship—not that she was actually in love with Paul, but she believed in him utterly and placed him on a pedestal above other men. It flashed across her that he might have wished to try his power and now drew back, afraid of going too far. Had she, then, shown her preference so openly? Her cheeks flamed at the suggestion. She heard him saying something about standing in the smallest domains on earth, and turning to him with a brilliant smile, she said:

"Monaco, with its miniature court, is like a

pocket edition of a kingdom; yet Monte Carlo, containing endless possibilities of tragedy and comedy, is after all but an epitome of life, where most of the passions have full play."

"And some of the virtues, you admit?"

"It is hardly a place to rehearse them."

"Yet even within reach of the Casino, one might meet with sacrifice and renunciation."

His voice had a sober ring. The cold, salt breath may have reached him also. Trixie's manner softened. If he but felt that retreat signified renunciation, she could—in part—forgive him.

"There are some natures so saintlike that even cobblestones may serve as praying carpet and every milestone as an altar. For myself—I need much paraphernalia to accompany devotion, male surpliced choir, swinging incense, unearthly music, worshipping crowds, and the knowledge that my sacrifice is being fully appreciated, before I would walk a single heated ploughshare for duty's sake."

Paul Herbert smiled; perhaps he read Trixie better than she knew, but once having decided that their friendship had reached a limit beyond which it would be unsafe to venture, nothing could turn that decision a hair's breath. She misunderstood the smile. "If it is but a

jest to him— How could she pay him 'back in his own coin?" her nerves were on edge and got the better of her judgment. She ignored the noble nature proven to her by a hundred golden deeds. Paul's smile was a bit of tinsel, flapping in her eyes and hiding the sterling metal. Assuming a nonchalance, she abruptly changed the subject, and gayly asked if he was going to tie Susie Hubbard's nuptial knot.

"They have not asked me yet; I did not realize that the wedding was to be so soon."

"Isabel has arranged it should be before we all leave; Susie has no near relatives and there was no need of dragging on the engagement. Mr. Mordaunt's people are coming on from England, and Mrs. Saunders is rousing herself to superintend a lavish *trousseau*."

"What delightful Americans they are."

"Were you prejudiced against our cousins across the salt pond?"

"No, but some I have met were not to my taste."

"Alack! how many Englishmen are not to mine," laughed Trixie.

"Perhaps your fate wills you to lead a life abroad."

"Perhaps it does," she answered lightly.

Next day he recalled this trivial talk with mingled feelings of regret.

"See, the tide has turned," exclaimed Trixie, watching the blue waves which the breeze was beginning to ruffle into tiny white foam caps.

"If we could but know what it takes out with it far into the ocean!"

"Driftwood, seaweed and all the beach flotsam and jetsam."

But the tide that day bore besides a girl's lost hope and left it buried fathoms deep beneath the sea.

As they turned to retrace their steps through the gardens, Comte Jules de Villeneuve met them.

"I have been sent after the wanderers; the ladies wish to have ices and we are to join the rest at the entrance." His manner was extremely courteous; inwardly he fumed at the *tête-à-tête*. If a little bird could but have told him what these two had been discussing, but no friendly songster was forthcoming to warble so much consolation in his ear. He was somewhat comforted later by Trixie's, talking to him all the way back to Mentone. He was to dine with the Laymans and hurried to his own hotel to dress for dinner. An answer from the marquis awaited him. It urged him to form an alliance with one of those "charming and rich English and American girls who flocked

to the Riviera each season." The letter concluded with a sharp reminder that the writer could never make a will in favor of a bachelor relative. These words and the *tête-à-tête* stroll at Monte Carlo, decided the count's course of action. After dinner he seized a favorable moment, when none could overhear his words, and formally made Trixie an offer of his hand. She turned away her head a moment in silence, and then said:

"Allow me till to-morrow morning to consider your proposal, M. le Comte, and whatever my decision, believe me, I can appreciate the honor you have done me."

At least, she had not refused him, and this to the count savored of success. He strutted home elated in anticipation of her "yes" on the morrow. Harold, who had lingered talking to Bertram, abruptly asked Sinclair if he had ever met a Sir Lester Barristable.

"Never heard of him; who is he?"

"Not a jewel, I imagine, from what I heard at Monte Carlo this afternoon. Well, good-night; I must pay my third duty visit, or my obliging patient will be reporting me," and he wended his steps to the villa which the invalid had rented for his short stay at Mentone. As he walked in the starlight, puffing at a cigar

and meditating on the remarks dropped about
"Sir Lester and his amiable Lady Beatrice,"
this message was being wired from Paris to
Nice:

"TO LADY BEATRICE MILLBANKS,

"Hotel de l'Europe, Nice.

"Am detained on important business. Impos-
sible to come this week.

"L. B."

XVI.

HAROLD's patient proved perverse enough to become convalescent, and Sir Julian telegraphed for his colleague to return to harness, though the patient demurred and offered a blank check for Harold to name his own terms; but his chief insisted. When the good-bys were said, Gertrude's face blushed its own tale. Harold winced; he was far too tender-hearted to knowingly bring pain into any woman's life, but his sympathetic nature lent him soft looks and gentle tones, which could be easily construed, by too willing listeners, into love's language. What he read in the young face at parting, added one more pang; the first and deadliest pain came the morning Bertram burst into his room with the strange news of Trixie's engagement to Count de Villeneuve. The two men discussed its every point; took this, to them, amazing fact and turned it over and then went at it again and fairly tousled it as a dog would a bone; but they could find nothing to justify its existence. Bertram stormed: a

Frenchman forsooth! Was not honest Anglo-Saxon blood sufficient for her mightiness? Harold, loyal to the last, was fearing for her happiness in foreign lands. His own forlorn hope lay buried long ago; its bones seemed to rattle in its grave at the suggestion of his beloved lady entering wifehood with eyes so wilfully blinded. The episode with Paul Herbert puzzled them. Well as they knew him, neither would have ventured a question to relieve their minds, and their *pros* and *cons* were shots in the dark. Could Trixie have refused him? Had he proposed? Harold felt that he was wandering in a maze, and the clew slipping through his fingers. Both Bertram and Harold marveled and sighed and sighed and marveled, and came to no conclusion as to the why and wherefore this girl, near and dear to both, had signified her desire to become Countess de Villeneuve. Holding her hands, with farewell good wishes on his lips, Harold vainly tried to read rebuttal to his fears, in those proud dark eyes, but the lowered lids barely lifted enough to flash a friendly glance at her old playfellow. His heart thumped rebelliously against his ribs. "Why should a French count win this one priceless woman?" was ever the refrain it sang as Harold sat in the "*train de luxe*" and watched the Riviera vanishing in the distance.

When Isabel Saunders brought the news of Trixie's engagement to Villa Millefleurs, Etoile exclaimed:

"The count has lost no time in carrying out my suggestion; how amusing."

"But it is so sudden; does Miss Sinclair really love him?" There was a tone of anxiety in Madame Millefleurs' voice, and Isabel wondered if it arose from regret at Etoile's decision.

"I cannot understand Trixie; I tried to sound her on the subject, but she crept into her shell, and that is such a tight fit I could not crawl in after her. Bertram is quite distressed about it."

"Where is Bertram?" broke in Etoile.

"He is coming later, with Paul Herbert."

"Ah, your other friend has left?"

"Poor fellow, his patient would get better; very inconsiderate of the man, but sick people are often very selfish, though I confess that in some ways this one was a model patient, for he only expected Mr. Jewett to feel his pulse three times a day, and telegraph once to Sir Julian. The rest of the time the young doctor spent with us."

"Happy *medico*!"

"You are so sincere in your flattery that one has to believe it, dear Madame Millefleurs."

You always make people think the very best of themselves."

"Is that not better than letting them dwell on the worse side of their natures?"

"Perhaps," said Isabel, doubtfully; "but most men are so vain, it seems a pity to encourage them in their conceit."

"Do I encourage them?" pleaded Madame Millefleurs. "No, no," she continued, deprecatingly, "I would only reassure erring mortals that we are all blessed with a dual nature and that we can live up to our ideals as well as sink to our temptations; but encourage conceit, and in men—never!" She finished the sentence with a pretty gesture, throwing out her hands as only a Frenchwoman can do gracefully, and the American girl thought for the hundredth time how charming her hostess looked when animated, how she endowed words and action with grace peculiarly her own, and how unlike she was to ordinary women. No wonder Etoile dreamed day-dreams with such a mother. In fact, there were moments when these friends' fascination fairly jarred upon Isabel as something to be feared rather than admired. This arose from no jealousy on her part; she was far too generous and warmhearted to cultivate envy. Nevertheless, there had been moments

since her engagement to Bertram when his intimacy with the Millefleurs made her wince. To hear them call him by his Christian name invariably nettled her. Her common sense rebuked these feelings as childish and ill-natured, but Isabel was in love, and common sense, under those circumstances, had little hearing.

Sitting with Madame Millefleurs in the long drawing room, she chatted of her plans and of Strathways, often echoing Bertram's words, and enjoying the pleasant hour, yet wished that she need not share the charms of Villa Millefleurs with her *fiancée*. Etoile had soon dropped out of the conversation. She often sat silently interested and would listen when others talked, giving them a smile or glance from the violet eyes when words seemed unnecessary. She was at the window, watching the changing sky, with its shifting light and gray clouds presaging a shower, while Isabel and her mother discussed the *pros* and *cons* of matrimony. It almost sounded sacrilegious to Etoile, for love in wedded lives, with its infinite mysterious possibilities, filled her heart with awe. The idea of marriage without love was, according to her belief, an unpardonable sin. In a dreamy way she pondered upon the mismatched couples she knew, and wondered

whether in the wide world any one existed who might be all in all to her.

It was rarely that Etoile let her thoughts wander in these bypaths; there was much yet unexpressed in her nature, much which she felt without actually defining. In her limpid soul floated many thoughts which, if dragged out into words, would have lost their delicate beauty just as the finest sea weeds when fished out of the sea lose their exquisite tracery and become a mere confused wet mass. The clouds gathered faster; Etoile slipped out of the room, for she wanted to get some flowers before it rained. Watching the sky she ran down the drive into the garden, where Bertram and Isabel had first divined the old, old story. She quickly filled a basket with scented blossoms; the sky lightened; perhaps the shower would pass by; she would have time in any case to wander to the rocks and bring back some of the trailing vines which grew there in profusion. On the way she picked more flowers, till the basket overflowed with its fragrant burden. Pushing aside the shrubbery, she knelt on the ledge of rock which bordered the road from the entrance to Villa Millefleurs. It was here that Sir Lester Barristable had first seen her. Etoile, to carry the vines, hung some of them round

her neck and wound others round her sunny head. She was just starting for home, when a vivid flash of lightning, followed by a peal of thunder, drove her hastily to the shelter of a miniature cave, hidden in the bushes among the rocks.

As the first heavy drops of rain began to fall, Bertram and Paul were nearing the villa. They hurried their steps to escape a soaking and sought refuge from the shower under the stately trees guarding the gates of Villa Millefleurs.

"Not the best nonconductor for lightning," observes Bertram, scanning the skies. "If this continues, we are better in the open."

"We shall be drenched to the skin and appear before your goddess like drowned rats."

"I know of a place among the rocks; let us try to get there while the rain lifts," and Bertram started, followed more leisurely by his friend.

They left the road and scrambled up the ledge. Bertram peered among the bushes, "Here it is," he exclaimed, and just above them they saw an opening into a natural cavern—a gap of darkness fringed with gay geraniums, a great shelving rock forming the roof of the cave.

"It is clearing and there is a rainbow," remarked Paul.

The sun was suddenly shining, the rain still falling, but softly, as if its gusty violence had already been spent. As the young men raised their eyes toward the heavens, a vision appeared out of the darkness of the cave, a veritable Flora, arms flower laden and vines trailing over the shoulders down upon the white dress and crowning the golden curls, framed in the dark mouth of the grotto, with the sun streaming on her upturned face, and above the blazing arch of promise in the sky.

Bertram felt a throb of pleasure that his fairy friend should dawn upon Paul Herbert's vision in picturesque guise.

"Etoile," he cried, "look at the bow behind you."

The girl, gazing at the brilliant tints in the heavens, remained silent, while the men climbed to her side.

"What, have you no word of greeting?" asked Bertram.

Etoile slowly turned toward them, noticing Paul for the first time; her beautiful eyes looked into his with surprise and evident pleasure, but she did not speak. The splendor of the skies seemed to have fallen upon her, the

violet of the rainbow in her eyes, the gold of the sun in her hair.

"Where is your welcome, dear Dryad? This is my friend, Mr. Paul Herbert."

She held out a slim white hand; a smile parted her lips:

"Forgive me if I stared, but you are so like my St. George; you know the one, Bertram, it hangs in my sanctum."

"Yes, the tutelary god of your day-dreams, Etoile; you should appreciate the compliment, Paul."

But the clergyman was not in a responsive mood; he clearly saw that the young girl was out of the common, that she was endowed with beauty and the higher gift of personal charm, but his life as a preacher who tried to follow out the precepts he taught, had its limitations and repressions, and made him apt to cavil at all that savored of affectation or gush. He believed so thoroughly in enthusiasm that he scoffed at mock heroics or sentimentality, and though broad in sympathies and tolerant of other's creeds, he was sometimes inclined to be impatient with fads and poses, particularly when they cropped up among the feminine portion of his acquaintance.

"It is not," he thought, "that this child (for

she is scarcely more than one) intends to pose, but her picturesque surroundings and an evidently romantic mother's adoration, create an unreal atmosphere at the villa. A little plain diet of common sense and poverty would prove an excellent substitute for this moonshine fare."

Bertram noticed and regretted his friend's mood, without divining the wherefore.

Etoile seemingly accepted it as belonging to a stranger to whom hospitality must be shown. "He is wise and good, and, from Bertram's account, almost a saint. I suppose the wayside posies seem scarcely worth the plucking to minds that soar to crags and edelweiss," and thus meditating, she walked between the two men through the long cypress-shaded drive to the house.

Madame Millefleurs accorded her new guest a gracious welcome. As the shower was over, they sat on the *loggia* and drank chocolate, while the clouds drifted away and the clearing skies promised a glorious sunset.

"I have news for you, Miss Saunders; Mr. Mordaunt has asked me to take his duties for a couple of weeks while he and his bride spend a few days in Venice."

"Then I shall have a chance to hear one of your sermons, Mr. Herbert; we shall muster a

large party and sit directly under the pulpit. You must join us, Etoile, for you may never again have such an opportunity."

Noticing the young girl's hesitation, Paul said quickly:

"Mademoiselle no doubt considers us heretics and could not wish to endure a half-hour's dissertation on our doctrines."

"We are Protestants, monsieur, but I fear not very strict churchwomen," replied Madame Millefleurs.

"And I should almost fear to hear your sermon," added Etoile.

"Pray, why, mademoiselle?"

"You work among the poor, you comfort the sick, you pray with the dying; so your life is your best sermon. I know this from Bertram. Your actions preach so much, I should dread that mere words might teach less and create a sense of disappointment in you."

"I am afraid my little girl is most unorthodox and perhaps I should say, unconventional. She shocks many people."

"Oh, *maman!*"

"From your own telling, your French cousins turned pale at your speeches," laughed Isabel.

"Oh, if you had only seen them listening to my views upon marriage; it was just before

we met you, *chère amie*. There was a houseful here, such good girls, educated in convents and believing that they were to courtesy and say, "Yes, thank you," when their parents presented a *parti* to them," and Etoile's rippling laugh sounded like music to Paul Herbert.

When he left the villa he carried away two distinct impressions, which remained with him for many an hour. Firstly, that Bertram was absorbed in his new friends; secondly, that Isabel was aware of this and resented it.

A few mornings afterward, in a stroll about the town, Paul visited the hospital. He passed through the neat but bare-looking halls into the wards, following by a gentle-voiced sister, who evidently took much pride in the institution which to her visitor seemed very meager after the well-appointed hospitals he knew at home. In the men's ward Paul Herbert caught a glimpse of some ladies, but did not look in their direction a second time. He was standing near a cripple, to whom the sister was speaking words of cheer, when a sweet smile lit up the poor man's face, while his eyes turned toward the other side of the bed. He apparently hardly noticed the sister. The clergyman followed his glance and saw Etoile, with her hands full of flowers. She bent over the patient, not noticing the Englishman.

"See, I do not forget; here are the flowers I promised you."

"You are an angel, signorina," murmured the cripple.

"You may be unorthodox, but you believe in charity." Paul had joined Etoile, and was watching her with fresh interest.

"Not charity, the word is mistranslated; it is love—ever love; I do believe in that, and daily lament to see my friends fussing and fuming over the non-essentials of life, till they have no time left for the essentials—and love is the greatest of these. If we could only eliminate the selfish, belittling, conventional side of our everyday life, trivialities would wilt and die by the wayside, like idle weeds, and in their stead sweet flowers of truth and love would bloom across our path."

"Etoile is day-dreaming again," put in Madame Millefleurs, linking an arm in her daughter's.

"Second thoughts are best," meditates Paul. "The girl is an enthusiast, and the genuine type is so rare she should forgive me for doubting hers; and enthusiasm is the Alpha and Omega of my creed. Were not Confucius, Buddha, and even Christ Himself, the most unconventional enthusiasts of their day, hearken-

ing to no *vox populi*, but to the voice of God? They brushed away the cobwebs of conventionality at their feet, and lifting their heads to the stars, strode on, voicing aloud undying truths to eternity."

Once again that week Paul met Etoile. He had heard of the little cemetery overlooking the town, and wandered there one afternoon. Taking the walk leisurely, he went through the narrow streets of the upper part of Mentone, noting the picturesque bits which artists love—here a group of black eyed women, knitting and chatting in an old doorway with Murillo babies tugging at their gowns, there a quaint belfry, rising up into the cloudless blue sky, anon a glimpse of blazing sunlight at the end of a narrow dark street, at length the climbing road beyond the town to the hilltop, where many weary strangers have laid their bones to rest. Paul sauntered among the graves, some more pathetic than others in their neglect, and slowly made his way to a place where there is a fine view of Mentone and the Mediterranean. Bending over a modest mound, marked by a single headstone, was Etoile, intent upon decorating the grave with flowers. She did not seem surprised to see Paul, but held out her hand in greeting.

"Is not the view beautiful? I should like to lie here some day."

"May that time be far hence," and the words were uttered fervently. "What friend are you remembering?"

"No friend," replied Etoile. "This is a stranger's resting place, and as no one seems to recollect him, I bring a cross or wreath for the anniversary of his death. I am sure it would please him if he knew that at least he is not quite forgotten."

Paul Herbert, without speaking, smiled at the sweet, upturned face.

"Now I see you as you really are," she exclaimed, voicing an uppermost thought.

She rose from her kneeling position and dusted the earth marks from her white dress, and added:

"A smile that comes from your heart tells more than many talks. At first you seemed stern; now I know you hold my creed and believe in love, too."

"Of course I do."

"Then open the ring and let him in," hummed Etoile.

"Into your world?" asks Paul, who had heard of her fancy.

"It is yours, mine, and that of all those who love."

"But there are a thousand different modes of expressing love; remembering the dead is one."

"The living have so many to remember them—the dead so few," said the girl wistfully. I sympathize with the professor's little daughter, who, brought up on a strong diet of mythology, let her heart go out to the neglected gods and was discovered one day kneeling before a tiny altar which she had secretly built in the garden: 'Dear Father Jove,' she prayed, 'every one seems to have forgotten you, but I will keep this altar for you, and pray to you always.'"

"I verily believe you would like to pay your own devoirs to the heathen deities."

Etoile laughed. "I plead guilty to a longing for a glimpse of Pan and the fauns and a stray nymph or two. I used to long to find a fairy, and when a child used to invoke them in every woodland dell—alas! in vain."

"If there are any left I think their abode would be Villa Millefleurs."

The innocent violet eyes gazed doubtfully at Paul Herbert. Was he laughing at her.

"Ruskin believes in fairies," she said as if in self defense."

"And I believe in Ruskin," hastily explained her companion, sorry to spoil her pretty fancies and forgetting how he dictated a plain diet of

facts as useful antidote to Etoile's exuberant imagination.

With him, as with others, her simple, straightforward nature won an almost instantaneous recognition. Near her he felt in the presence of a pure, fearless soul, whose existence was a prayer, who unconsciously preached to others her own innocent creed. She interested him immensely, but her very charm, combined with Madame Millefleur's fascination, made him fear for Bertram; it was obvious that his friend was becoming more and more absorbed in these two women. What would be the end? Not only Isabel was to be considered, but Etoile herself. Where was she drifting to, with those loving eyes lighting up at the bare mention of Bertram's name? Paul felt inwardly stirred to action and outwardly extremely helpless to lift the least finger in warning.

"It may be Kismet," he thought; "yet I am no fatalist, but the circumstances are exceptional."

Etoile had been gazing dreamily into the distance, and while Paul silently watched her, she turned suddenly and said:

"You who are a clergyman and know what is right and what is wrong, should be able to tell

me why I love God and yet do not like to sit in church; is this so very wrong?"

"It certainly seems scarcely right to love God, yet absent oneself from His house."

"But His house is everywhere; the hills, the sea, the plains full of blossoms, all speak to me of Him. Out of doors prayers come to me without preface or text. All tells me of His love. Are not the flowers themselves called 'God's smiles?' The sunshine on the ocean, the moon's silver silence in the heavens at night—all preach to me of faith and love."

"That is natural religion; revealed religion might bring you even more delight—the glimpse into the sanctuary of the Holiest."

Etoile clasped her hands and listened reverently to Paul. He was touched by the girl's attitude and would have continued in the same strain, but here Nera loomed in sight. She had been taking a stroll while her charge decorated the stranger's grave. The clergyman, having heard of Bertram's little adventure, looked closely at the woman. She appeared confused and endeavored to hurry away.

"Are you sure we have not met before?" he asks in English, much to Etoile's surprise.

Nera shakes her head and mutters something in French about his being mistaken.

"Madame will be waiting," she repeats, urgently, and whisks Etoile off before another question can be framed.

"I rarely forget a face; I believe that is the woman who came to my old rector while I was his curate, some twelve or fourteen years ago. She was in great trouble and asked his advice—her name was—of course—'Nera' that explains it," and Paul smiled, amused at the coincident and attempt at mystification. "After all, it is none of my business."

He watched Etoile disappearing from view and wondered what future lay in store for her who, though sympathizing with sorrow and mourning sin, had never come in contact with either. "When she does," he thought, "it will not alone take the bloom off the peach, but the feathery down off the butterfly wings."

XVII.

THE Hotel des Anglais was astir over the Mordaunt-Hubbard wedding. The actual ceremony was to take place in the English chapel, and the reception following immediately afterward would be held in Mrs. Saunders' suite, with an adjoining drawing room thrown open. Mr. Arbogast, the complaisant landlord, had superintended the details of the wedding breakfast and the rooms were beautifully decorated with palms and flowers.

Susie Hubbard walked about like a girl in a dream, now all tears at the thought of parting with her friends, now radiant glancing into the near future where she would have a husband to love and protect her. and guide her lonely little feet to a fireside and a home. Mrs. Saunders and Isabel purchased and packed, and busied themselves generally about the *trousseau* and wedding preparations. Relations and friends of the bridegroom arrived from England, and for once the little hotel sets fraternized on the common ground of the approaching festivity.

When the happy day dawned, the whole hotel was in a flutter of excitement. The chapel was crowded, the English and American colony turning out in full force to honor the popular clergyman and his pretty American bride. Bertram, sitting next to Isabel, longed for his own wedding day, and his *fiancée*, seeing the wish in his eyes, blushed furiously, upon which Bertram felt irresistibly inclined to take her in his arms then and there, but nobly surmounted the temptation. Paul Herbert performed the ceremony.

"The robes suit him," thought Etoile. "He is a true priest and fit to serve at God's altar."

The wedding march ushered the wedded pair from the church out into their first little journey together in life as one. At the reception Paul noticed tears in Etoile's eyes.

"Does a wedding always make you sad?" he asked softly.

"It is not the marriage, when it is for love, of course, that seems so solemn, but the thought of all those two hearts must encounter. Think what it would mean if poverty or sorrow dimmed this love; what would there be left, but Dead Sea fruit?"

"The girl is waking into womanhood; may Heaven shield her innocence there as it has

throughout her childhood," thought Paul as Lady Ethel and Gertrude joined them and prevented further *tête-à-tête*. Trixie, more handsome than ever, but strangely silent since her engagement to the Count de Villeneuve, had been announced, was unusually friendly in her congratulations to the newly married couple. Paul watched this with interest. He realized now that at times wisdom hobnobbed with her intimates to some advantage. Yes, it was worth while to cultivate Minerva in preference to Venus, particularly for a man of Paul Herbert's caliber.

Lady Ethel, who liked the young clergyman immensely, had noticed what she suspected was a growing admiration for Trixie on his part, and felt distinctly disappointed when the two, having drawn toward each other, drifted leagues apart again. She made a point therefore of bringing him into conversation on every available opportunity, going out of her way now and again to show him attention. Gertrude, too, was glad to seek refuge from her stormy feelings in the calm haven of Paul's glances and sympathetic voice. One thought comforted her not a little; Harold had accepted an invitation to Thornycroft; she would see him during the summer, and not at a hotel, but

in congenial home surroundings. After the reception and breakfast, amid speeches and congratulations, Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt started ahead of time for the station, under protest and a shower of rice and slippers.

As the excitement of the wedding festivities died down and the Hotel des Anglais began to assume a normal aspect, Mrs. Saunders exclaimed:

“And now, Isabel, we can go to bed early, and not mention the word *trousseau* again.”

Trixie, glancing round at the fading flowers and disordered table, confides to her *fiancé* that she had been well amused, and wondered that her aunt, Lady Beatrice Millbanks, should have missed the fun.

“Lady Millbanks—your aunt!” stammered the count, in open consternation.

“Lady B, or Aunt B, we call her,” answers Trixie, lightly, ignoring the count’s start. In fact, she took little trouble to study his looks at all.

They had mutually felt relieved when neither evinced a desire to be demonstrative. Count Jules inwardly rejoiced that his charming *fiancée* was a woman of the world, not given to gushing, while Trixie, stifling the inner voice that cried “Wrong, wrong!” when she accepted

the count, was thankful that no special signs of affection were expected from her. The engagement had run along smoothly hitherto, without exciting interludes. The count, charmed by Trixie's beauty and manner, drew a breath of satisfaction when he thought of his old cousin's will. This time the marquis must be satisfied. The only cloud in his sky was the vexed question of a dot. He started to sound Bertram on the subject and received a vague answer to the effect that the Duke would do the right thing when the time came. Meanwhile the duke's answer to the announcement of his granddaughter's engagement was not forthcoming. Trixie had wondered at the delay, but Lady Ethel fancied her father might have gone to Scotland for a short trip and not had his letters forwarded. With a prospective coronet in view, Trixie wished Lady Beatrice to meet the count and wrote off a nice letter asking her aunt to join them, but the invitation had been declined in a letter brimming over with good wishes. Nothing, in fact, would have induced Lady B. to meet Count Jules de Villeneuve for the present. She had not forgotten his introduction to her at the Café de Paris at Monte Carlo, and she was on thorns to know whether his discretion would veil that small incident

from his *fiancée*. The day of Susie Hubbard's wedding found Lady B. in a state of nervous excitement. Nearly a month had elapsed since Sir Lester Barristable had been called to Paris on business. His short notes since then hinted of money embarrassments, but he had promised to join her in a week. At last, impatient at his prolonged absence and unsatisfactory explanation thereof, Lady Beatrice had written an angry letter, demanding his return to Nice. A telegram stating that business detained him was the sole answer. It came to her then, suddenly and swiftly as lightning out of stormy skies, that this was the beginning of the end. At first she sat stunned, letting the hours pass without note of time, then arousing herself from this apathy, she wrote a hurried note to an intimate friend in Paris, humbling her pride enough to ask for the truth. A prompt reply came: "Expect the worst, *ma chère*," wrote the worldly little marquise, "these men are all alike. I have heard several rumors; will make it my business to learn more. In a day or two you will learn all I know, but save your tears whatever occurs; no man is worth a salt drop from *vos beaux yeux*."

A few feverish days and the bolt fell. A scented, pink-tinted note, with silver mono-

gram in the corner of the paper, innocent enough to look at, but deadly as viper fangs to the waiting heart:

"You have been grossly deceived, *ma mie*."

The delicate handwriting seemed to stand out in blackest relief. "He is a wretch, not worth a thought; his engagement is announced; he is to marry the young daughter of the banker Dunois."

What matters the invectives the marquise had added to her news or the drops of balm she tried to instill by elaborate assurances of undying friendship? "Engagement" and "young" were the two words that struck home. The thrust was too sure not to reach its aim.

Accompanying the letter was a Parisian newspaper with a marked paragraph stating that the well-known Englishman, Sir Lester Barristable, had just become engaged to the only daughter of M. Albert Dunois, the rich banker, and that the wedding was shortly to take place; that the bride, who was a lovely brunette of eighteen, had received the magnificent gift of a diamond *parure* from her father.

Lady Beatrice's mail had been brought to her rooms by her Italian maid; the little enameled clock on the mantel shelf struck twelve; Susie Hubbard had just become Mrs.

Mordaunt, when Lady Beatrice realized to the full her lover's treachery. Though the room was warm with spring sunshine, she shivered and fell back among the cushions of the sofa, as if struck by a physical blow. She crushed letter and newspaper in her hand as she would like to have crushed the young daughter of the rich banker, Dunois. Her quick brain was evolving a hundred schemes to lure her truant lover back to his *devoirs*. She knit her brows, her face pale with rage; revenge, revenge, cried her heart. Suddenly she threw up her arms, dropped the crushed paper and note, and burst into tears.

An hour later she telegraphed to Sir Lester to expect her in Paris next evening. Having played her trump card, she awaited events. Shortly a telegram was handed to her:

"At great inconvenience will come to Nice to-morrow night.—LESTER."

So far so good. She must marshal all her forces for her final *coup*, and if that failed—well, *après cela le deluge*.

First, she must rest her tired brain, so as to be able to cope with whatever turned up in the coming momentous interview; secondly, she must prepare her prettiest tea gown, have her

sitting room redolent with the sweetest flowers, and thus armed with woman's subtlest weapons *cap-à-pie* to battle for the rights which should be hers. According to her clouded lights, she had been loyal to Sir Lester and helped him through many an evil hour, and for a mere matter of money—with a young girl thrown in——

Rage for some seconds dominated love, but the passion she had felt for Sir Lester was too powerful to be trampled under foot at a moment's notice, though pride itself demanded the sacrifice.

During the following twenty-four hours Lady B. suffered perhaps more than she ever did before in her self-indulgent life. Necessity urged a forced calmness—even to sleeping part of the night. The next morning and afternoon dragged on their weary length, then an early dinner and a small bottle of Mumm's *très séc.*

Outwardly self-possessed, inwardly her heart a tempest, she sat waiting till Sir Lester was announced. He bowed coldly on entering the room, laid his hat and gloves on a table, and stood facing her:

"Well, you have your wish; I am here—to avoid a hysterical scene in Paris. Now, madame, what do you want?"

As she heard his cutting tones and noted the cynical expression of his mouth, her heart sank.

"This is hardly what I expected you to say, Lester," she began gently. "I do not think I deserve such treatment at your hands after all these years."

"Oh! if you are going to be retrospective, I fear my time here will be limited," he interrupted in the same cold tones.

"Lester!" cried Lady Beatrice impassionately, "is this the end?"

When a man is tired of a woman and wishes to be rid of her, nothing she can say or do will alter his resolution; the more loving she is the colder he becomes; the grace and beauty that once charmed, appeal in vain to his senses, now chained elsewhere.

Sir Lester looked with utter indifference at the woman whom for years he had admired and even liked in his worldly way. She bored him now; his one desire was to have this *mauvais quart d'heur* over. After all, what harm could she do him? Old M. Dunois, having accepted him as son-in-law, closed eyes peremptorily upon past peccadilloes; his pretty *bourgeois* daughter would be admitted, he fancied, in good English society. She would be able to go to *les "sports"* with her fashionable hus-

band at the castles of great lords. No, Lady Beatrice could not influence the banker. And little Marie? She was a gentle schoolgirl, still warm from the convent, loving him in a modest, girlish fashion. She would believe only what her lover chose she should and no more. Besides, he wisely concluded that, knowing an open scandal would ruin Lady Beatrice's reputation, she would hesitate to parade her disappointment publicly.

"Is this the end?" she repeated, her voice vibrating with passion.

"Of a certain phase of our relations to each other—yes; it is best for both; but not the end of our friendship, I hope."

"Friendship!" cried Lady Beatrice, with a bitter laugh.

She was looking her best, with a bright color in her cheeks; her graceful tea gown of soft lavender silk, trimmed with lace and fairy French fingers, was open at her throat and fell away from her round, white arms. Once Sir Lester would have covered neck and arms with kisses. How keenly she realized that she no longer had the power to please him; it was death to feel this. She rose from the sofa and crossed the room to where he stood. With a quick, impulsive movement, she threw her arms round

his neck and laid her burning cheek against his face.

Hastily he withdrew from her embrace, and, pushing her away, he said: "Don't be dramatic; it is so wearying and to no purpose."

For a moment she remained silent, gazing at him with her whole soul in her eyes, and then burst into wild weeping.

"I came here at your request, but evidently you had nothing of importance to communicate,"

"It is you who have the news to communicate," she sobbed. "I know of your intended marriage; where are your promises? Oh! you liar!"

"If you are going to be violent, I must bid you good-evening."

"Fool! fool!" cried Lady Beatrice. "Do you think you can marry another woman? I will prevent you."

"And as you add threats to violence I shall avoid all future scenes by bidding you not only good-evening, but good-by."

He seized his hat and gloves and fairly flew from the rooms.

Lady Beatrice started as if to call him back, but realizing how useless it would be, threw herself upon the sofa and buried her face in her hands, while her heart cried, "Lost, lost, lost!"

XVIII.

It was Etoile's birthday, and a *fête* was to be given in her honor. Some twenty intimates had been invited from Mentone, to spend the evening at the villa. Bertram and Billy and Robbie Saunders had gone up in the afternoon to help hang colored lanterns and aid in the decorations. They skurried back to the hotel in time to dress for dinner and escort the ladies in the evening. Isabel was in high spirits, and looked very beautiful in a pale blue gown, and fairly rivaled Trixie, who seemed graver than of yore. Count de Villeneuve was also more silent than usual and in no frame of mind for *fêtes*. Late that afternoon he had received an unwelcome missive from the old marquis, in which his relative plainly called him a fool for not having the question of Trixie's dot settled at once, and added that upon inquiry the marquis was grieved to learn that the young lady whom the count sought in marriage, though no doubt estimable, was no suitable

alliance for a Villeneuve. Had Jules known that there was a bar-sinister in the Beaulieu family and that Bertram would never succeed to the title? And last, but not least, Lady Beatrice would prove an objectionable acquisition to any family circle. Therefore the marquis vowed he would disown his cousin if he proceeded to consummate this proposed marriage.

As a gentleman, the count felt aghast at the thought of breaking his engagement with Trixie; as a man of the world, with whom money was of almost paramount importance, it appeared terrible to anger the marquis and probably lose a future fortune. Between the two fires the count squirmed but arrived at no decision, except that next morning he would have an interview with Bertram and insist upon a definite answer as to settlements and inquire into the truth of the marquis's statement. He admired his *fiancée* enough to feel a genuine regret at the idea of losing her and of appearing ungallant in her eyes. Trixie was so preoccupied by her own perplexities that she barely noticed the count's increasing gloom until Isabel rallied her on not keeping him in better spirits.

"It is most likely indigestion from too much

Welch rarebit or *caviar*, or whatever else our prospective lords and masters indulge in before retiring," carelessly remarks Trixie.

"If Bertram appeared to me in the light of a prospective master, I fear he would have to remain in prospective *ad infinitum*," rejoined Isabel.

Villa Millefleurs, illuminated by a hundred tiny lamps and lanterns among the trees and around the house, looked like fairyland, with its terraces and fountains white in the moonlight, and the clear sky and twinkling stars overhead. The guests wandered about, enjoying the beauties of the place until an impromptu concert drew them to the long drawing room. Etoile, flitting about like a veritable fairy, beamed with happiness, her only regret being that unavoidable duties had forced Mr. Mor-daunt to have his wedding the day before.

"They would have enjoyed it so much, sighed Etoile.

"They are probably enjoying themselves quite as much," observed Paul Herbert, to whom the remark had been half addressed. "Just wedded, combining the sweets of the honeymoon with Venice the beautiful! How ideal! Do not wish them back even for this charming *fête*."

"Soon it will be our honeymoon they will discuss," whispered Bertram to Isabel.

There was a wealth of love in the shy glance she gave him for answer. The young girl was supremely content that night; every one favored her engagement, and Bertram seemed to her as a king among men. He was so honestly in love, and Isabel fully appreciated the value of his affection.

Trixie missed none of these little asides of her brother's courtship and resented them keenly. Was it necessary to parade his attachment publicly? And she grumbled that between his *fiancée* and the Millefleurs her brother rarely spent an hour with her now.

Paul Herbert could not but draw a contrast between the couples—the joyous brightness of Bertram's engagement and the unceasing gloom overspreading Trixie's. He did not sympathize much with her, for he felt that it was with wide open eyes she had willed to select the count as her life's partner.

Etoile looked at Trixie and wondered, and sighed that the sister of her dear friend could accept the hand of a man whom she did not love.

"If we only dared to speak frankly to her."

"Truth is a sword that should rarely rest in

its scabbard, yet never strike home save for the suppression of wrong."

But Etoile had no time to listen to Paul Herbert's philosophy. An artist claimed her attention; charades were proposed.

"We must have costumes," said the artist.

Nera is called and soon produces some dominoes and theatrical dresses which Etoile and her cousins had used two winters earlier in a play they gave for the benefit of a local charity. A long cloak and old-fashioned cape are required, and Nera, busy helping the artist in draping the actors, suggests that an old trunk might contain what is needed.

"If mademoiselle would not mind getting the things, as servants might ransack one's belongings."

Etoile, supplied with a bunch of keys, flies upstairs to the attic, opens Nera's trunk and unearths two old-fashioned cloaks, snaps the lock, runs back to her guests, shaking out the garments as she hurries downstairs. In the half light of the hall a little book falls from the folds of one of the wraps, unnoticed by the girl, who trips along, intent upon the charades.

"The massive gate of circumstance
Turns on the smallest hinge."

Etoile, unconscious that those leaves fluttering to the ground mean the turning point in her life, passes into the dining-room, where the artist is still costuming his *dramatis personæ*. The little impromptu sketch is successful, and at its termination dancing commences.

As a servant hurries through the upper hall, her foot strikes against the prayer book, which is picked up and deposited on a table in the hall below.

The hours sped by. Trixie, restless, was unable to enjoy the *fête*, and the count's gloom increased. Every one else seemed to take the young artist's view, who declared that life's goblet should be held in both hands and no heel-taps left.

It was growing late, and some of the guests had begun to depart, when Bertram, separated for a few minutes from Isabel, was leaning against the wall of the *loggia*, listening to the music and watching the moonlit gardens below, where the gay little lamps and lanterns flashed like gigantic fireflies among the trees and shrubberies. Suddenly Etoile's white gown gleamed before him.

"Bertram, come with me a moment; I have discovered something most extraordinary." The girl's voice was vibrating with suppressed emotion.

He followed her retreating figure down the cypress lined road toward the rose garden. The night was warm and still, and the splash of the fountain sounded invitingly cool. Etoile sat down upon the marble seat where Bertram and Isabel sat the day they first came to the villa. Two small red lamps hung above them in the trees, casting a soft rosy light over Etoile's sheeny dress. Taking a seat beside her, Bertram exclaimed:

"What is the matter, my dear; you look so startled, I am prepared for Pandora's box, at least."

"Oh! Bertram, I don't know what to think; my head is in a whirl. I was standing, talking with Mr. Ashley, in the hall, and absently picked up this little book from the table, opening and shutting the clasp until something written inside caught my attention. I looked at it more closely and could not wait a moment without asking some one what it meant. I stole up to *maman* and showed her the book. She glanced at it and said, 'It is not mine,' evidently knowing nothing about it. She was engaged with Mr. Saunders and Lady Ethel, and I did not like to disturb her. Nera had gone to bed. As it concerns you, too, I felt I must have you see it."

"What concerns me? You are not very coherent, dear Etoile."

For answer she opened the small silver-clasped prayer book. On the fly leaf Bertram saw some writing; he held it toward the light of one of the little red lamps and read:

Waymore:

Bertram Reginald Sinclair, b. Aug. 30,
1870.

Beatrice Mildred Sinclair, b. Oct. 5, 1872.

Henry Reginald, Earl Farraday, d.
November 10, 1874.

R. I. P.

"Etoile Marie Millefleurs, b. April 21, 1875,
Toulon, France.

"August Millefleurs, d. Jan. 2, 1889.

"And now abideth these three, faith, hope,
and charity,

"And the greatest of these is charity.

"SUSAN BLACK."

As the meaning of the entries dawned upon Bertram his heart almost stopped beating. He tried to speak, but for a moment his lips refused their office.

"What does it all mean, Bertram, and who is Susan Black?" asks Etoile, much agitated.

"Nera," murmurs Bertram, as his memory travels back to the day when he and Trixie were sent for from their tea in the "Roost," and

the housekeeper had kissed the children good-by."

"Nera!" gasps Etoile, "and all these years *maman* and she never told me, and why, oh! why has there been any secret?"

"Don't you see? can you not understand? Susan Black was my father's housekeeper and devoted to my mother."

"Your father's housekeeper! What, Nera—our Nera?"

"She joined you when you must have been about three or four years old," answers Bertram. His voice sounds unnatural and his face has grown very pale.

"But why did she make a secret of this?" persists Etoile.

"Great heavens! Are you blind? Do you not realize what these entries signify to you and to me?"

Bertram had involuntarily sprung to his feet, and Etoile mechanically rises, too, her lips parted, her violet eyes wide open with a startled expression.

"Oh! tell me the truth," she cries.

"You know my story; this is a sequence. By these dates, you were born five months after our father's death, and the duchess never knew of your birth, oh! Etoile, little sister! to think that your mother is mine!"

In his excitement he had not noticed how his words affected Etoile, until she swayed forward and fell at his feet.

"Good God!" he cried, kneeling down and lifting the girl from the ground, "this shock may kill her." He hastily carried the insensible light figure to the fountain's edge and splashed some water in her face.

Slowly the white lids unclosed, and Etoile sat up, leaning against Bertram, as he knelt by her side. After a few moments' silence, she whispered, "Bertram, is it true that I am your sister?"

"Dearest, yes; I have no doubt of it."

"Oh! I must ask *petite maman* at once," she cried, struggling to her feet. Then suddenly, she stood quite still, "But she has kept it a secret all these years—my own lovely, loving *maman*; we must not pain her, must we, Bertram, if she does not wish it known; and yet," her voice broke a little, "my father, that is, M. Millefleurs, must have known; he adored *maman*."

"For her sake, he saved her name."

Bertram's word tore away the last shred of the veil before Etoile's eyes; the whole sad story of her mother's love and sacrifice lay before her. A cry of despair came from her very

heart. She threw up her hands as if fighting some invisible force. Bertram took her in his arms. Instinctively he felt all she suffered.

"Dear sister, I and Trixie will share it with you, and remember that *petite maman* is still our dearly loved mother."

Every nerve in his body was tingling to think that this gracious, adorable Madame Millefleurs was the woman who had brought him into the world and had been all in all to his father.

"Yes, yes," sobbed Etoile, letting her golden curls rest on his shoulder, "we will love her all the more now, and never let any one know this great secret. Oh, Bertram, my heart is so full. Comfort me, comfort me."

Silently her brother kissed the upturned face and thanked God that his prayer had been answered. So absorbed were the two that neither heard approaching footsteps. As Etoile, bewildered, realized with sorrow and joy that this revelation would mean grief for her mother and gladness for her dear brother, Isabel and Trixie and the count, who were looking for Bertram, stood before him. He raised his head; Etoile started away from his arms and was about to speak, when Bertram laid a warning hand upon her arm and whispered: "For our mother's sake, we dare not divulge our relationship."

There was a moment's portentous lull and then to Etoile's excited imagination the very heavens seemed to open and the end of the world to be in sight.

All that actually happened was a sharp "*Mon Dieu!*" from the count; a groan from Trixie. It was Isabel who spoke first; she was very pale and the moonlight silvered her blue dress.

"Here's your ring," she said in a low, but distinct voice, drawing from her finger the handsome emerald and diamond ring Bertram had given her.

She held it out to him; he did not move, and the ring fell to the ground, where it lay, sparkling, between them.

"Oh, Bertram! how could you be so false?" cried Trixie, finding words at last.

"Speak to her; oh! say something," implored Etoile, clasping her hands in despair.

"I cannot explain matters," said Bertram in dull, heavy tones. "I love you, Isabel, and always shall. Etoile is to me as a sister. You doubt me, and I can only repeat that I love you and am loyal."

Isabel turned away as if she had not heard him. "What are we waiting for?" she said coldly. "Let us go home," and without an-

other glance at Bertram, she left the rose garden, followed by Trixie and Count Jules de Villeneuve.

Etoile sank down on the bench, trembling in every limb. "Oh! this is terrible," she cried. "Bertram, what is to be done?"

"Nothing," he answered between set teeth. The hopelessness of righting himself in Isabel's eyes was only too apparent.

After a few bitter minutes, Etoile rose. "I must find *maman*; my heart calls for her; she must know the truth now. God is good; He will help us all."

She kissed Bertram on the forehead.

"I will wait here till our mother sends for me," he replied.

Nearly an hour passed; the fountain splashed soft music; the little lamps flared up and went out and the moon bathed the whole landscape in a white light; the breath of hundreds of roses and violets ladened the night air with perfume; carriage after carriage rolled by with departing guests, and then absolute silence fell upon the place, save for the low voice of the fountain.

A thousand conflicting emotions filled Bertram's breast—joy at the thoughts of reunion with a mother long wished for, and keen an-

guish at Isabel's action, but the lover for the moment was subservient to the son. All the garnered tenderness of years seemed to leap forth with welcome for a mother's touch and kiss. A shadow in the moonlight, and he looked up, expecting Etoile. Madame Millefleurs slowly approached him, one delicate hand lifting the trailing robe; the other was pressed against her bosom as if to still the beating beneath her bodice. Her large dark eyes were luminous with unshed tears. Bertram hastily rose to meet her. He took her hand and raised it to his lips.

She seated herself beside him on the marble bench, and falteringly tried to say something to him.

"Explain nothing yet; it is happiness enough to know that we belong to each other, dearest—dearest mother."

"Oh! my darling," she cries, and after the hungry interval of years, holds her boy to her heart.

XIX.

TRIXIE was cut to the soul at the unexpected development of affairs. That Bertram, her beloved brother, whom she supposed the very soul of honor, should be guilty of such treachery, was almost beyond belief. In a few halting sentences she conveyed to Isabel her sympathy and indignation. With her aunt and cousin her reserve broke down, and she talked freely and fiercely. The ending of the engagement seemed a real catastrophe to her. The three women sat discussing the events of the evening until almost dawn. Isabel had gone to her room and refused to talk the matter over, even with her mother or aunt.

"I have been mistaken in Bertram, and there is nothing more to be said." Her pride kept emotion in check and she would not show gaping wounds to her little world, only unbending behind bolted door.

Paul Herbert, hearing from Count de Ville-neuf what had happened, determined to await Bertram's return from the villa. The count

also decided not to sleep without eliciting some word from Sinclair about the dot.

Bertram surprised both men by appearing with tranquil mien, reflecting the gentle light of loving woman's eyes. Paul took his arm and they walked up and down the deserted hotel garden.

"No, I cannot explain matters to you," repeated Bertram to his friend. "I am very happy and unhappy. I worship Isabel, and Etoile is to me as a sister; my conduct is blameless, though it may not seem so to others."

"It will be difficult to convince Miss Saunders of that," replied Paul emphatically; "to see one's *fiancé* embracing another young lady is not calculated to inspire much confidence in a right-minded girl's heart."

"I am loyal to Isabel, all the same."

"Can you not trust me?" asks his friend earnestly.

"You, if any one; but there are reasons which render all explanations impossible."

And with this Paul Herbert was obliged to depart, wondering what the mystery could be and determined to try to solve it.

With the count, Bertram was more curt. At the word dot he stiffened, a hint about Lady Beatrice sent a thrill of rage through him, and

a question as to the bar-sinister capped the climax.

"I doubt if my grandfather will consent to settle this evidently vexed question of dot according to your satisfaction, and as our family history seems to raise doubts in your mind, I should advise you to reconsider the eligibility of your proposed alliance with my sister, and advise her of your decision."

Then, icily bidding him good night, Bertram turned on his heel and left the count to unpleasant meditations.

In the office the night porter handed the young Englishman a telegram. It was from the old rector, Mr. Jewett, asking him to return to Strathways immediately, as the duke was dangerously ill. Bertram sat down and wrote three notes, one to Madame Millefleurs, explaining his sudden departure, another to Trixie, telling her to wait until he telegraphed the duke's condition, as Mr. Jewett was somewhat of an alarmist. The third was to Isabel and ran thus:

"If you loved me as I love you, nothing would shake your trust in me. You have my whole heart, and in your soul must know it. I love Etoile dearly as a sister. God knows that her pure nature would not let her

love me otherwise than as a brother. She had just gone through very deep waters; I comforted her in all innocence. There is nothing more to add. I love you, Isabel, and always shall, until this little life is over, and then I hope to love you still better and still more purely, throughout eternity."

After a short, uneasy nap, Bertram left for England, and his three notes were the first heralds of his departure.

Lady Ethel, and Trixie, and Gertrude were much disturbed at the news of the duke's illness; they began to pack so as to be able to start at once, if needed at Strathways. Lady Beatrice had to be told and they were discussing sending a telegram to Nice, when the count offered to go over and take a message instead. He had his own reasons for wishing to hear a little more about the wide-awake widow who so often scandalized her compatriots abroad.

Trixie accepted his offer gladly; in her present anxiety and trouble, his presence seemed to irritate her.

Paul Herbert, distressed at the general state of affairs, decided to pay a visit to Villa Millefleurs and see if any solution to Bertram's conduct could be gleaned there. As he climbed the hill the recollection of his first visit came

vividly back. All Etoile had said since only confirmed his impression of her high nature.

"She cannot be in fault," he thought, and though appearances were against Bertram, Paul Herbert felt that somehow there must be an explanation, though for unknown reasons it was not yet forthcoming. When Madame Millefleurs appeared in the *loggia*, where Paul sat awaiting her, he was struck by her manner. The nervousness so often noticeable of late had vanished; a great calm seemed to possess the woman, as if she had entered upon a haven of her desire after a stormy passage. There were signs of late stress in the lines across her broad brow, and dark circles shadowed her eyes, but peace had come on healing wing, and Paul Herbert recognized that he stood in the presence of a soul that had suffered and conquered after long struggle.

Madame Millefleurs' reticence was disarmed by the clergyman's eloquence. He spoke lovingly of Bertram and pleaded that the happiness of his friend's life was being sacrificed, unless some one volunteered information.

The beautiful dark eyes grew troubled. "Surely Isabel would have love enough to trust a nature so loyal as Bertram's?" She ventured this tentatively.

Paul scouted the idea. Miss Saunders was very charming, but inclined to be positive and wilful. Having established the theory of her *fiancé's* unfaithfulness, she could not or would not lightly shake it off. Etoile, pale, and quieter than usual, joined them. She listened with anxious eyes.

"I think monsieur is right; Isabel would not easily forgive what to her seems a great wrong. Oh! *maman chérie*, why not trust this true friend?"

Madame Millefleurs turned a shade paler. Was this needed? Did Etoile estimate the cost of confession?

Paul watched the mother and daughter, wondering what was to be the outcome if they concluded to break the silence that hemmed in Bertram's trouble.

"Let me think it over; Monsieur Herbert will excuse me for a little."

Alone with Paul, Etoile glanced pleadingly at him: "Will you like us just the same when you know?" she asks.

"Why should I not?"

"Some people would feel differently, yet Bertram told me how good you have been to him."

For a moment her sentences, seemingly disconnected, puzzled Paul; then, suddenly, with

one of those intuitions, or brain waves, which come to some highly strung, nervous people, he knew the truth. Nera, Mrs. Black, the beautiful long sought-for mother, Trixie's dark eyes, so like Madame Millefleurs. Now that his mind caught at the clew to the story, the rest followed easily.

"Beg your mother to explain what she can to Miss Saunders; I know that is best and that this young lady will appreciate Madame Millefleurs' courage in speaking."

He rose to leave. Etoile held out her hand.

"You have divined our secret," she said simply, her eyes filling with tears, and a wave of color flushing her pale face.

Paul held the little hand a moment longer than necessary: "Whatever I have realized from putting two and two together is sacred, and all sorrow but endears my friends to me."

"All sorrow—but not all sin," said Etoile sadly.

"It is not for me to judge the past; that is God's province. I take people as I find them, and, believe me, mademoiselle, I am a friend to you and yours."

Some hours later Madame Millefleurs' card was handed to Isabel, as she sat writing a letter. Controlling the surprise she felt at this

visit, she signified her readiness to receive her visitor. Mrs. Saunders, who had been considerably agitated by the events of the past night, hastily withdrew to her room. Isabel smiled as she sealed and directed the letter, and left it lying on the table. "I am glad this was written before she came," and with this thought she rose to greet Madame Millefleurs, who at once came to the point.

"I have called to tell you why you saw Bertram Sinclair take Etoile in his arms last night," she began. Her voice trembled, but she continued bravely, "Bertram's happiness must not be sacrificed; you are entitled to know the truth.

Isabel noticed her agitation, and said gently: "Do not distress yourself, dear Madame Millefleurs; I know you are honorable and Etoile also; say nothing to me now."

"But Bertram——"

Isabel held up her head proudly. "I have had time to think things over; his note this morning came as an answer to my thoughts. I do not understand Bertram's conduct, which startled me last night into inconsiderate action, but I do believe and trust him with my whole heart and have written, assuring him of this. There is my letter, just finished as you arrived."

Madame Millefleurs' eyes filled with swift, glad tears. "You will be repaid for your trust by a life's devotion," she said softly, "and now, more than ever, you deserve to know the truth."

And so Isabel learned that Bertram had found not only a mother, but a sister.

XX.

ARRIVING at Nice, Count de Villeneuve called on a friend and heard much to confirm his fears regarding Lady Beatrice, and he decided to leave his message at the hotel. He wrote a few lines, informing her of the duke's illness, and asked that the note might be delivered at once. The clerk to whom it was handed hesitated, and then observed that it was doubtful whether her ladyship would get the note immediately. There had been some trouble; the two hotels were endeavoring to hush it up. Had M. le Comte then heard nothing? Considerably alarmed, the count demanded "as a friend and relative" to hear what had happened. Piece-meal all the sensational story was related. There had evidently been a quarrel; Sir Lester, alack! too well known to all the employees, called on Lady Beatrice the night before. He had not been in Nice for a month, and only remained a few minutes, when he betook himself to another hotel near by. Some time later—the hour uncertain—Lady Beatrice had unobserved left her apartments and followed Sir Lester to

his hotel, ascertained his rooms and gone there while he was in the *café*. She had been recognized by a waiter. Sir Lester went to his rooms at about midnight, and directly afterward two shots were heard. When the frightened servants opened the door, they found the Englishman on the floor, dangerously wounded, but refusing to give the name of his assailant, and declaring it had been an accident. Lady Beatrice had vanished. The police sniffed out the affair, but the hotel people were determined to give no definite information, feeling that publicity would be detrimental to their interests. Lady Beatrice was ill in bed and no one was allowed to approach her but the Italian maid. Sir Lester Barristable had telegraphed to Paris for a friend, who was expected shortly.

This scandal was the last drop in the count's cup. Leaving the note to be handed to Lady Beatrice by her doctor, he took the next train for Mentone, quietly packed up his traps and took French leave of his friends. *En route* to Italy he breathed again, and at the first station telegraphed to the marquis that his wishes had been carried out. The train had hardly taken the count out of Mentone when a letter was handed to Trixie. She opened it, glanced at the signature, knit her brows and

read slowly from the beginning. It was written in the count's best English:

"**MADemoisELLE:** Permit me to express my great regret to inform you of the illness of Lady Beatrice Millbanks. I left a note to be remitted to her by the doctor. Also, it is my sad duty to tell you that there has been a scene terrible between your aunt and her friend, Sir Lester Barristable. It is perhaps not to be in the journals, but most people know it privately. Sir Lester is shot. By whose hands it is not necessary to say. Believe me, also, most honored mademoiselle, that I am desolated to tell you my family are not content that we marry ourselves. I am not a rich man and my wife must naturally bring some dot, which your excellent brother could not assure me of. But besides this, I have ascertained the secret you did not impart to me—the reason why monsieur *votre frère* cannot be the duke following. This and the notriety which Lady Beatrice has given to herself, push me to a *triste* task. I must separate from your too charming society. From my heart I am wounded at the termination of our engagement. I beg you to me believe always

"You devoted and desolated servant,

"**JULES DE VILLENEUF.**

"**MENTONE, le 22m Avril.**"

A small bomb could scarcely have caused more excitement in Trixie's little circle. Her

aunt and cousin and her friends were most indignant at the count's epistle, although they secretly rejoiced that she was rid of him. Isabel openly congratulated her.

After Madame Millefleurs' visit, Trixie had been told that Bertram was to be gladdened by a letter from his *fiancée* which would obliterate the painful episode of Etoile's *fête*. For her brother's sake she thanked heaven that the fates had been kind to him, but she still felt dissatisfied at his conduct, and would not forgive Etoile for what she insisted must then be her fault. Isabel, at Madame Millefleurs' urgent request, refrained from telling Trixie the truth until Bertram returned, and she vainly tried to formulate adequate excuses for Etoile.

The news about Lady Beatrice, however, swallowed up all other considerations for the time being. Lady Ethel was so shocked at this fresh catastrophe, coming so soon after the news of her father's illness, that she completely collapsed. Gertrude, roused out of her usual calm, got her mother to lie down and sent for a doctor, who ordered complete rest and hinted at nervous prostration.

Trixie felt unable to leave her aunt and cousin while they needed her care, for Gerturde was not strong. Besides she scarcely felt a de-

sire to mix herself up with Lady Beatrice's affairs. It was Paul Herbert who instantly suggested that he had better go to Nice. At first Trixie refused the offer, but Isabel pointed out that there was no one else to go, and in Christian charity some one should try to help Lady Beatrice in this sore trouble.

"It is all so disgraceful," cried Trixie with flashing eyes and burning cheeks. She could not ignore that she had been thrown over by the count partly because of her aunt's actions.

Paul had promised to dine at the villa and he drove there in the afternoon to make his excuses. Madame Millefleurs and her daughter listened to his story with deep interest. Etoile changed color more than once; her violet eyes were wet with tears; sin and sorrow had been brought home to her at last, and Paul regretted that he should be the means. He was *en route* for the station, and made his story short. As he rose to leave, Etoile touched him gently on the arm.

"Take me with you," she said.

"Impossible!" exclaimed Paul Herbert, considerably startled by the proposition.

"*Chère petite*, you are dreaming," cried her mother.

"No, no; it is so clearly my duty. Her

other relatives are unable to go, and if they went their righteous wrath would interfere with their pity; but I have only sympathy with such dreadful grief. The sorrow caused by sin is surely the worst of all. When Lady Beatrice realizes that I love her, she will not mind having me near her. You know, *petite maman* what a good nurse I am. Think of her broken heart, and only a paid maid by her side. Dearest, you who love sad people too, will not refuse to let me go with dear Monsieur Herbert."

Etoile's arms were around her mother's neck as she spoke. Madame Millefleurs looked at her daughter in silence for a moment and then said quietly:

"You are right, little girl; but I must go with you, as chaperon, though I feel that it will be best for you to see Lady Beatrice alone, and not tell her I am at Nice. If Monsieur Herbert will kindly wait a few moments, we will accompany him."

And so the three started together on the errand of mercy.

Since guessing the outline of Madame Millefleurs' story, Paul Herbert had felt closely drawn to her and Etoile, partly owing to their being Bertram's mother and sister and partly for their own sakes. The dread that the charm

of their society should prove baneful to his friend had alone prevented him from giving himself up unconditionally to the pleasure of their friendship.

Etoile remained silent on their way to Nice, but Madame Millefleurs seemed to find relief, after years of restraint, in unburdening herself to some one she could trust. It was thus that Paul learned the details of her marriage with the old merchant. He had been a friend of her father's, and had seen her as a child. On Lord Henry's death, Estelle Le Comte, not liking to return to the aunt whose roof she had forsaken, and having no parent or near relative living, decided to return to France and hunt up one of her father's old friends. The idea of keeping her unborn babe to console her widowed heart had flashed into her mind on the morning of the duchess's visit. Mrs. Black aided her in carrying out the plan and her financial affairs were placed in M. Millefleurs' hands. The elderly business man had fallen violently in love with Estelle, and offered marriage and the adoption of her child as his own. His devotion had touched her heart and she became his wife. They moved to Toulon; none knew the date of their marriage, and Etoile was born to a home and father. When the child was about four

years old, her mother fell ill of a fever, her life being despaired of. M. Millefleurs hearing Mrs. Black's name mentioned, sent for her, and she became Nera, beloved by Etoile.

Paul pondered over these details, wondering what Trixie would say when she heard the whole story. She had never felt much love for her unknown mother, and keenly resented the blot on her name. Still she must realize Madame Millefleur's charm, and love her and Etoile. The idea of some happiness shining through the gloom now surrounding his friends, gave Paul Herbert genuine pleasure. He was most unselfish in his affection and ready to spend himself freely for others. He could, therefore appreciate the feelings which prompted Etoile to go to Lady Beatrice Millbanks.

Reaching Nice, they drove to the Hotel de l'Europe, and Etoile gained admittance to her aunt by sending word to the Italian maid that Lady Beatrice's niece wished to see her. As the young girl entered the ante-chamber to the suite, the maid, seeing a stranger, tried to stop her, but Etoile determinedly passed on into the sitting room. It was darkened, and huddled up on a couch lay Lady Beatrice, her face turned toward the wall. She turned slightly on hearing a step.

"Is it you, Trixie?"

"No, it is I, Etoile, Trixie's sister."

"What!" exclaimed Lady Beatrice, for an instant forgetting her misery and sitting up in sheer surprise.

The girl knelt down beside the couch and in a few words told her story. Lady Beatrice listened in a dazed way, passing a hand over her brow, as if to still her aching head. When Etoile had finished, Lady Beatrice murmured:

"Yes, you are very like my brother; I wonder Ethel did not see the resemblance. You have the family coloring. And Trixie and Bertram are like your mother. How odd it all seems."

A wan smile passed over her face; she moved as if to get up, and caught sight of her own disordered reflection in a mirror opposite. She was still in the tea gown worn the night before. It was crushed and torn, her soft light hair fell upon her shoulders and her eyes were red from weeping. She looked abjectly wretched.

"Oh, heavens! I had forgotten; he may be dead," and she flung herself down again upon the couch, in a paroxysm of tears.

Etoile, still kneeling, gently laid a cool little hand on the burning face:

"We have sent to his hotel to learn the latest

news; you will soon know. Courage, dear Aunt Beatrice; God is merciful; we are praying that He will not lay this crime at your door. I have come to stay with you awhile and you must let me love you very much."

For forty-eight hours Sir Lester hovered between life and death; then his strong constitution won the day. The incident was hushed up and only a hint of it crept into the papers. Etoile remained most of this anxious time at the Hotel de l'Europe, fighting the devils of despair that sought to take possession of her aunt's soul.

Madame Millefleurs remained near, and felt thankful when on the third day Etoile believed her duty done and was ready to return to Mentone.

Lady Beatrice, humbled to the dust, afraid of meeting her sister and Trixie, clung to this new niece who, in her direst hour of need, had come to comfort her. She longed to return to England, knowing her father was ill, but dreaded the effect of an interview with him if he knew the truth. Etoile assured her that he would never be told. At last she decided to take a trip to Switzerland and put time and space between herself and the misery suffered at Nice. She sent a message to Trixie:

"Tell her," she said to Etoile, "that pride goeth before a fall, and never to forget that being human, we are all likely to err, and let her thank her stars she is well rid of that count, whose title was the only decent thing about him."

Before she left, a telegram from Strathways brought reassuring accounts of the duke's health. Then the talk dwindled to an *on dit* and mere club echo, and Nice forgot one unhappy woman's existence, who sought to cool her burning heart amid the ice and snows of towering peaks, till some of the calm of the mountains entered her soul. She answered home letters, but the snap and sparkle of her pen was gone. She spoke vaguely of her future plans; in her own mind she had decided to remain abroad indefinitely.

As soon as Sir Lester was able to be moved, he returned to Paris, and a month later married little Marie Dunois.

It was a great relief to Trixie when Bertram telegraphed good news, for she felt she could not bear one straw's weight more. Lady Ethel on the sofa, semiinvalided for a few days, Gertrude in tears, the duke's illness, Lady Beatrice's terrible behavior, the count's letter breaking her engagement, all combined to tax

her powers of endurance to the uttermost. She was grateful to Paul Herbert for his tactful kindness during these days of anxiety and worry. He cheered her concerning the duke's illness, smoothed over the stinging shame of the Nice scandal, and talked common sense about the ending of her engagement. Without a trace of anything approaching sentiment in his manner, he conveyed to her a distinct impression of warm friendliness that was most consoling to her wounded pride.

The evening that Etoile and her mother returned home, Paul and Isabel accepted an invitation to dine at the villa. A pleasant surprise awaited the young American; Etoile putting her arms around her neck, kissed her, and, holding up a small parcel, cried:

"It is yours if you guess right."

But it was hers, although she failed to divine the contents, and the engagement ring once more shone on her hand. Nera had picked it up in the rose garden during Etoile's absence.

Mrs. Saunders was spending the evening with Lady Ethel and Gertrude. Trixie, feeling restless, had gone for a stroll by the sea wall; she felt out of tune and lonely; life seemed such an utter failure. She did not regret her own engagement was at an end, but

she did resent the cause prompting the count's letter. The stigma of her birth burned into her soul that night. She sat down, looking out across the sea, and watched the twilight deepen into darkness. Her heart was very heavy and her thoughts flew back to early days when, unbeset with care, Bertram and she improvised games in the bare playroom or exchanged secrets at the "Roost," and intermingled with each picture of the past she saw Harold, ever her devoted playfellow. The night she refused him came vividly before her. Had she blindly thrown away her happiness after all? A great wave of regret swept over her. No one else had loved her so unselfishly and truly. To him, at least, no shadow marred her maiden worth; she had reigned as proud queen in his heart once—and now? She sighed, and lo! his voice sounded in her ears, and Harold, with love shining in his honest blue eyes, was taking her hand and saying how he had flown to his beloved lady the moment news of the count's departure reached him; and could she not forget all the past as an unreal dream, and let him share whatever troubled her, were it Lady Beatrice's follies or Bertram's soul? and as the darkness gathered, his patient waiting won its reward. Trixie, knowing her heart at last,

kissed him as he drew her close within his loving arms.

It was Paul Herbert who had telegraphed to Harold the news of Trixie being free, and no one rejoiced more than he over his friend's happiness.

Lady Ethel heard the news with a pang for her daughter, who, with pale face and quivering lips, gently wished her cousin much joy. Alas! at life's high feasts the gods still claim a blameless victim; the knife in Gertrude's breast sank to the hilt, but she faced the altar lights without a murmur.

The moment of parting had come. The duke being better, Bertram would meet the Saunders in London, and the entire party was to travel together. Lady Ethel, recovered from her indisposition, was anxious to start. Billy and Robbie Saunders were already anticipating reviving the glories of the "Roost," which Bertram had described to them. While Isabel read and reread her *fiancée's* last letter, she counted the moments until they could again realize the happy silence that envelops lovers at times when the heart seems too full for speech.

Etoile could hardly believe that scarcely a week had elapsed since the night of her *fête*,

She had come down with her mother to spend an hour with the Saunders the morning after her return from Nice, and there learned of Trixie's engagement to Harold. Paul Herbert, who joined them in Mrs. Saunders's sitting room, sat apart a moment with Madame Millefleurs, urging her to see Trixie, but her mother's heart foreboded pain to the girl's proud spirit, and shrank from the task. Seeing her hesitation, and knowing that the next day would be too late, Paul decided to act on his own judgment. "Trixie may live to regret a thousand times losing the opportunity of having a mother fold her in loving arms." And thus thinking, he sought Harold forthwith. Mrs. Saunders had gone to superintend some special packing and Isabel sat close to their guest, feeling unutterably tender toward the beautiful but still to be unacknowledged mother of her beloved Bertie. Suddenly Trixie entered the room and walked straight across to where they were sitting. The dark eyes had lost the hard look which often marred their beauty and which, beneath Harold's impassioned glances, was never harbored again. She laid a hand caressingly on Madame Millefleur's shoulder, who started and rose from her chair.

"Mother," said Trixie, in a low sweet voice,

trembling with emotion, and Isabel, slipping away, knew that Trixie's pride had been vanquished by her love.

It was a glorious night; Madame Millefleurs, Etoile and Paul Herbert sat on the *loggia* at the villa watching the shadows of the cypress in the starlight. The Mordaunts had returned that afternoon from an enchanting trip and Paul was to leave for home on the morrow. The Laymans, Saunders, Trixie and Harold had already been gone a week. Letters had come from them, begging Madame Millefleurs to bring Etoile to the weddings of Isabel and Trixie, but the idea of returning to England awoke too many painful memories, and the girl was disappointed; she longed to see her handsome sister and brother again.

"They will come back, dearest; another winter we shall have them here," says her mother for consolation.

Etoile sighed. "Heaven would be on earth if we could but be near all we loved."

"Surely heaven seems sometimes here, when only with the one we love," suggests Paul.

Etoile gazed dreamily across the stretch of olive trees and far away to the sea. "You will have a little heaven of your own then, for there will always be some one near to love you;

are you not St. George the valiant, with the dragon beneath your feet?"

Etoile had a trick of nicknaming her friends, and of late dubbed Paul, St. George, from his resemblance to a favorite picture of that saint.

"I am afraid my dragon is hardly subdued yet."

"You still have temptations to conquer; is what you mean?"

"Who has not?"

"You do not, then, divide the world into two cut and dried classes—the utterly bad, resisting no temptations, and the utterly good above temptations?" said Madame Millefleurs.

"No, I generally think of people as belonging to four classes:

The pure passionless,

The pure passionate,

The impure passionate,

The impure passionless.

To the first belong those predestined monks and nuns who are ascetic and spiritual; to the second, the motherhood and fatherhood of creation, the lovers pure of heart lost in each other; to the third belong the common herd, polluting society at large, and to the last, the small class of cold-blooded sensualists who cleave to vice for the mere sake of viciousness."

"The pure passionless, the pure passionate," repeats Etoile, softly, to herself.

"And who can say which is the higher of these two?" continues Paul, as if in answer to an unexpressed question.

"My little girl belongs to the pure and passionless," said Madame Millefleurs, drawing Etoile toward her.

"While you, *chère maman*, belong to the pure and passionate; I would rather be like you, dearest."

The clock indoors struck 11. Paul slowly rose.

"It is hard to say good-by, but it is late, and I have still much to do before leaving to-morrow morning."

"And so the last of our new, yet dear, friends is going, away too."

"Be assured, dear madame, the hours spent at Villa Millefleurs will not be forgotten."

"And you have been so kind and helpful to us all, I shall never forget it; God bless you, dear friend."

Paul raised Madame Millefleurs' fingers to his lips and then turned to Etoile:

"Good-by till we meet again, little star, whose light brightens your mother's life. God grant that the man be worthy upon whom your rays may fall."

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